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AN
ESSAY
UPON
MIRACLES.

In Two Discourses,

By WILLIAM FLEETWOOD,
Fellow of Eton-College.

The Second Edition Corrected.

L O N D O N,

Printed for Charles Harper at the Flower-de-luce, over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleetstreet, 1702.

ESSAY

ON

THE

D. D. and P. of the



THE
ESSAY
ON
THE
D. D. and P. of the
BRITISH MUSEUM
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ON
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D. D. and P. of the
BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

Henry Godolphin,

D. D. and Provost of *Eton*-
College

YOU know (my Honoured Friend) that I pretend to have thought a good while upon the Subject of the Book I offer you; and that I have been free enough to blame those who have gone before me, whether Ancients or Moderns, without distinction, or Respect to any Name

A 2 how

Epistle Dedicatory.

how great soever; some, for their downright begging the Question in debate; others for their neglect, or slight Solutions, of considerable Difficulties; others for attributing so great a Power to the Devil, as seemed, to me, utterly inconsistent with the maintenance of Christianity upon the Foot of Miracles; and most of them for leaving us Schemes very defective in some Parts, and very indefensible in others.

I have tried to do *otherwise*, and if I say I think *better*, it is that I may not pay You so ill a Compliment, as to present You with what I had not a good Opinion of my self.

However, because I may seem to walk in By-paths, and know
my

Epistle Dedicatory

my self as subject to Mistakes as other People, I do here publicly acquit You of any Concern, a Dedication may lay You under, to give me any Countenance, if I am charged with either Novelty or Error; I only am answerable for my own Faults; and indeed I will so answer for them, as to amend them presently, upon the first discovery of them.

I have no other use to make of your Name, than by its means. to tell every Body else, as well as your Self, that I have an Affection and Esteem for You, equal to the Obligations You have laid upon me, which yet are greater than all the World besides hath laid upon me. I will leave it to others to speak of the good Spirit You keep us
in

Epistle Dedicatory.

in at *Eton*, with relation to the Repairs of the *College*, and the discharging, in all points, the Trust reposed in Us, by our Religious Royal Founder; of the Pains you have taken in soliciting the Assistance of Benefactors, where the Burthen was much too heavy for Us; and of the great Example You set us, in Contributing your Self to the re-edifying *God's House*, where He is served in the most beautiful Simplicity and Plainness I ever saw; as far as a Material Temple can be so, it is, I think, the exact Resemblance of the *Church of England*. These, and a great many other things may be spoken of to your Honour, but not by me, in the manner they ought; at least not at this time; and I dare say, You will be content I leave this
Sub-

Epistle Dedicatory.

Subject, to come to the occasion of making these Papers publick; for an account of that is, as we see, fashionable enough.

I was some few Years since, thought fit, by my Superiors, to undertake the Defence of Religion against its Adversaries of all Denominations, in the same place and manner You have often heard it done so much to your satisfaction, by worthy Men appointed for that purpose, who have indeed done great Right to the Subjects they undertook, great Honour to their *Noble Founder*; and not without great Reputation to themselves. But I was not, (as it pleased God) at that time, in a capacity of undertaking any such Charge;

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however, I resolv'd to give some proof, some time or other, that I did not decline that Service, either to spare my Pains, or save my Credit. And as I then pitch'd (in my Mind) upon this Subject, so I have since (according to my leisure) prosecuted it, till I brought it to what you now see. And I find since, that I have not been sufficiently prevented by the Labours of any of those Learned Gentlemen; who, tho' they have, some of them, touch'd upon the same Subject, have yet left room for me, or a better Hand, to dwell more expressly on that great Proof of our Religion.

As to the Work it self, I have taken more pains to bring it within this small compass, than
would

Epistle Dedicatory.

would have served to make it a great *Book*; and to that end, I have made use of no Citations or Authorities, but set them by, on purpose; contenting my self with Reason and Revelation; excepting in a few of the last Pages, where it was absolutely needful; and yet the nature of the Work led me, I thought, to use a good deal of Repetition, so that I could not attain to the Brevity I aimed at.

I have made very fair War with such as are Adversaries to Revealed Religion, allowing them all that they can ask in the matter before us. I have made such Concessions, as by unconsidering People will, it may be, be suspected sooner than approved; but I have e-
ver

Epistle Dedicatory.

ver thought this was the way of dealing with them, or, if not so, that I, at least, was not a Man to deal with them.

If any one shall think it worth his while, to consider what I have written, and shall (in a manner becoming him and me) shew me my Faults, and give more probable Solutions of the Difficulties that occur in considering this Article of Miracles, he shall find how quickly I can change sides; and that I seek the Truth with such Sincerity, that I care not who it is makes the discovery, provided I may have a sight of it. Nay, I shall part (I hope) contentedly with a little Credit, to gain to the unbelieving World the satisfaction that it thinks it wants, from any other Hand,
which

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which it may not receive from mine.

You will excuse me, Sir, for having mentioned these things in a Letter to You, which had, it may be, better made up a *Preface to the Reader*; but it was to save a little Trouble, I am with all the Respect in the World,

Your most Affectionate and

most Humble Servant:

W. FLEETWOOD.

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An

AN
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UPON
MIRACLES.

In Two Discourses

DIALOGUE I.

A. **Y**OU were pleased to tell me, Sir, not many Months ago, that you would find a Time to talk with me, at large, concerning Miracles. I have, with some Impatience, waited for it, and hope I have found you now at leisure, to free your self of that Engagement.

B. You have; and I am now at liberty, to give you all the Satisfaction that I can, in that Point.

A. Will it not then be necessary, that you should tell me what it is you call a Miracle?

B

B. A

2 *An Essay upon Miracles.*

B. An extraordinary Operation of God, against the known Course, and settled Laws of Nature, appealing to the Senses.

A. Then, I perceive, that I must know what are the Ordinary Operations of God, what is the known Course, and what are the settled Laws of Nature, before I can be capable of knowing which are Miracles.

B. Yes certainly ; for how can you know which are Exceptions to a Rule, unless you know the Rule first ? God works no Miracles with respect to his own Power, for all things are alike hard or easy to him ; but with respect to his Laws, and to the Course of Nature settled by him.

A. How must I come to know the Rule, in this Case ?

B. By your Experience, Observation, and by the Use of your Senses, concurring with the Experience, Observations, and Senses of other People. The Operations that are constant, certain, and expected, are those we call the Ordinary Ones. And that is the known Course of Nature, which is the common and the usual one, with which we are well acquainted, and which creates no Wonder in us ; and those are the settled Laws,
by

by which Things have been all along govern'd. I am content you should remember Mr. *Hobbs's* Definition of a Miracle, — He says it is — *A Work of God, beside his Operation by the way of Nature, ordain'd in the Creation.* But unless we know his Operations by the way of Nature, and how things were ordain'd in the Creation, we can never come to know, which and what a Work of God is beside such natural Operation; and this we can only learn, by observing how things have all along gone, and how other People have also observ'd them to go. For as Miracles are extraordinary Operations of God, besides and out of the way of Nature, ordain'd in the Creation, and Appeal to the Senses; so it must needs be, that the Senses must be the sole and proper Judges of what the way of Nature is, that was ordain'd in the Creation, which only can be known by Observation and Experience.

A. Let me take you right at the beginning, I pray, that I may give you the less trouble hereafter. Miracles you say, being so many Appeals to our Senses, those Senses cannot otherwise judge of them, than by comparing their present Observations and Experience, with

their past ones ; and if they find that things are just the same that they have always been, and that nothing new has happened ; then they conclude there is no Miracle. This shews me plainly, that antecedent Observations of the Course of Nature, are necessary to the finding out what Operations are miraculous : And, I think, it will follow from hence, that nothing new, strange, prodigious, and astonishing, can be accounted properly *miraculous*, unless it thwart the common Course of Nature, and overthrow some settled Law of the Creation : And therefore, altho' I wonder never so much at it, having never heard or seen the like, nor, it may be, any one else, yet I account it no *Miracle*, because I know of no establish'd Law of Nature that is subverted by it. By this Distinction, I shall save you the trouble, in our future Discourse, of giving an Account of any thing, but what is properly *miraculous*. As for that part of your Description of Miracles, which says, they are *Appeals to our Senses*, I am so well satisfied with it, that I know not what can be objected to it ; nor can imagine how 'tis possible to judg of Miracles, but by our Senses ; and shall there-

therefore take it for granted, that where the Senses are not convinc'd of a Miracle, there neither is nor can be any Miracle. But is it quite so sure that all Miracles are the Operations of God? Can no created Being work a Miracle?

B. Not by its own inherent Power and Vertue, but by a delegated Power it may. The Course of Nature being settled by Divine Power, can be unsettled by no less: But God can yet commiserate the meanest of created Beings, with such a Power, if he so please: But then you see they are but God's Instruments, which he makes use of in his working Miracles; and therefore a Miracle wrought by the most superiour Angel, is no more his *own* Work, than a Miracle wrought by the meanest Man living, would be *his*. Each is the Work of God alike, whatever Difference there may be betwixt the Instruments.

A. How can you tell but Spiritual Beings (good or bad) may, by the Laws of their Creation, be Masters of such Force and Subtlety, as to be able to suspend or interrupt the common Course of Nature, to overthrow its settled Laws, and work Miracles? And if they be en-

du'd with such a Power, how can we know whether, or when they exercise it? Or how can we distinguish their Operations from those of God?

B. I have said already, that no Power less than that of God, can unsettle that establish'd Course of Nature, which no Power less than his could settle and establish; and that for these Reasons. 1. Because it would argue a Defect of Power or Wisdom, to leave the Laws of his Creation at the Will and Mercy of created Beings; this would not be, to be the Supream Director, Lord, and Governour, but to have Rivals, Cheques, nay, and Controulers of his Will and Empire. 2. Because there could, indeed, no Use be made of Miracles, if any one but God could work them, independently on him, and at their Pleasure. They could not manifest a Divine Power, if any less could work them; nor could they attest to any ones being sent of God, if any other than God could exercise such Power, because they might proceed from one as well as the other. You could not know I came from, and was sent by such a Prince, by my bringing his Seal along with me, if other People had the same Seal, and
would

would lend it to others to use as they saw fit. This I shall have occasion often to insist on, and you will find it so just a Consequence hereafter, that I think you will never be able to deny it; and therefore if you consider the Nature, Use, and Intent of Miracles, you will either find, that none but God can work them of his own inherent Power and Virtue; or if created Spirits had that Power given them by God, yet that they could not exercise it, but by Permission and Appointment; which, whether, and why, it may sometimes be given them, may be matter of Enquiry, in the Process of our Talk. Let it suffice at this time, that I affirm, that none but God can work Miracles, but still by what Instruments and Agents he sees fit.

A. May it be seasonable to ask in this Place, whether it be proper to prove the *Being* of a God, by Miracles, to such as believe there is no such thing in the World.

B. Miracles do certainly prove the *Being* of him who works them, because nothing can *act* that does not *exist*. But properly speaking, I think they rather *suppose*, than prove the *Being* of a God:

They *suppose* his *Existence* and *prove* his *Power*. If you could not convince an Unbeliever of the Being of God, from the Works of the Creation, produc'd with so much Wisdom and Contrivance, and preserved in so much Regularity and Order, according to settled Laws and certain Rules, you would hardly do it from the Interruption of this Order, and from the Overthrow of these establish'd Laws. But however I will not deny, that they may in some Cases, and to some sort of People, be properly produc'd, to prove the *Being* of a God.

A. But what is the principal and undeniable Use of Miracles?

B. Saving all other Uses, and denying none that may be made of them, I think the principal one is, the attesting to the Mission of any Messenger of God, and giving him Credit with those to whom he is sent, *i. e.* the Man who says he comes from God, and works Miracles to confirm the truth of what he delivers, is, for their sake, to be believed; because, if none but God can work Miracles, we may well believe he will not exercise such Power, but to the attesting what is true, nor suffer this his Seal to be put to any thing

that
11 12

that is false. This is the principal Use of Miracles, they give Credit to them who say they are God's Messengers, and we believe them upon their Account.

A. Will you clear up this matter a little farther, for you threaten, methinks, to build a great deal upon it.

B. I will; and will use the two great Instances of *Moses* and *Jesus Christ*, and desire you to make what reasonable Exceptions you can to any thing I shall say. When God had signified to *Moses*, his purpose of sending him to the People of *Israel*, to let them know, that He intended to deliver them from their Bondage in *Ægypt*, and also to bid the King of *Ægypt* let them go, *Moses* answered and said to God, *Exod. iv. 1. But behold they will not believe me, nor barken unto my voice, for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee. I am to go by thy Command, and tell the People, that the Lord hath appeared unto me, and sent me to prepare them for the great Deliverance he is now about to work for them. The Message will undoubtedly be very acceptable to them, a People wearied with intolerable Oppressions; but how shall I convince them of my Truth, and shew them that I was*
in-

indeed sent from God upon this Errand : Suppose that they should say as probably they will — *The Lord hath not appeared unto thee* : What must I say or do, to prove I came from God ? And the Lord said unto him, what is that in thine hand ? and Moses said, a Rod. And God said, cast it on the Ground, and he cast it on the ground, and it became a Serpent, and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said, put out thine hand, and take it by the tail ; and he put forth his hand and caught it, and it became a Rod in his hand. That they may know, that the Lord God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob hath appeared unto thee. The turning a dead Stick into a living Serpent, and the returning of that Serpent to a Stick again, is a thing so extraordinary and miraculous, that no Power but God's is able to effect it. When therefore the Children of *Israel* see such a Miracle wrought by thee, they will immediately conclude thou camest from me, and will believe, I have appeared to thee. This is evident, that the Power of working Miracles which God intrusted Moses with, was given him to testify his Mission, to witness to the *Hebrews* that he came from God,
and

and was to lead them from their place of Bondage, and great Misery, and consequently, that they must obey him.

A. I readily assent to all you say; but must we not also add, that this great Power was given to *Moses*, to convince the King of *Ægypt* and his Subjects, that he was sent from God, and that therefore he must let the People go, and sacrifice in the Wilderness?

B. Yes, certainly; for so God says himself, *Exod. vii. 9. When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, shew a Miracle for you, then thou shalt say unto Aaron, take thy Rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a Serpent.*

A. Then I must take it for granted, that the Power of working Miracles was given to *Moses*, to give him Credit both with the *Jews* and with the *Ægyptians*; and both of them were oblig'd, by virtue of these Credentials, to acknowledge he came from God, and consequently to believe what he said to them. But to this, methinks, there lies a plain Objection, that will hardly be well answered: Namely, that *Jannes* and *Jambres*, *Ægyptian Sorcerers* and *Enchanters*, whom they were call'd before the King and Court, to see what they could do, threw down

down their Rods, which were also turn'd to Serpents : You know, 'tis said, they also turned Waters into Blood, and also brought Frogs upon the Land, in the same manner that *Moses* and *Aaron* did before them. Now their Intent and Purpose in thus doing, being, I suppose, to convince *Pharaoh* and the Standers by, that there was no need of believing *Moses*, or of letting the People of *Israel* go, because of the Miracles they saw him work, since they themselves did also work Miracles, and yet declared, that neither was *Moses* to be believed, nor the People suffered to depart : Things I say, being thus, how could *Moses's* Miracles prove his Mission from God, when the Magicians wrought the like, and said, in effect, that he came *not* from God ? Why is *Moses* more to be believ'd than the Magicians, since they each of them wrought Miracles ?

B. I will give you what Answers are generally thought best, but to deal freely, I think they are not fully satisfactory. First then, it is said, that the Rods of the *Ægyptian* Sorcerers were not turn'd into *real*, but *appearing* Serpents ; and that the Devil who is a powerful and a subtle Spirit, helped his
Ser-

Servants in this Case, and so impos'd upon the Senses of the Standers-by, that to them the Rods appeared to be Serpents, tho' indeed no real Change was effected.

A. Let me say, as I think an *Aegyptian* might, to such an Answer, that this is really what we call *begging the Question*. What if one of *Pharaoh's* Courtiers should reply after this manner; " You say, " that *Moses's* Rod being turn'd into a " Serpent, gives an assured Testimony " to his Mission, and shews convincingly, he came from God, and ought to " be believed: But here you see, that " our *Jannes* and *Jambres* deny his Mission, and have turned their Rods into " Serpents as well as he, and therefore are to be believ'd as well as he. " You tell us that our Senses are deceived, and impos'd upon by Diabolical Illusions; we say the same of *Moses*, and do affirm that your Senses " are as subject, and as like to be impos'd upon as ours. You judg by " your Senses, that *Moses's* Rod was " turn'd into a Serpent, because it appeared to be a Serpent by its Colour, " Shape, and Motion: The *Aegyptians* " use their Senses as well as you, and " to

“ to them, their Sorcerers Rods are
 “ turn’d into Serpents, as they judge by
 “ the like Colour, Shape, and Motion.
 I do not know what could be answer-
 ed to this Courtier, in favour of *Moses*,
 that he would not honestly apply
 to *Jannes* and *Jambres* also: And there-
 fore I am of the mind to think them
 all true Serpents alike, but am still rea-
 dy to be better inform’d.

B. Secondly, the Devil, it is said, did
 secretly steal away the Sorcerers Rods,
 and in their stead as secretly conveyed
 true Serpents.

A. What if he did? might he not as
 well do so with *Moses’s* Rod too? or at
 least, it is as easily said by an *Ægyptian*,
 that he did so to *Moses*, as by an *He-
 brew*, that he serv’d the *Ægyptians* so;
 and I’m afraid this Answer gives us
 no Advantage. But where were the
Hebrews and *Ægyptians* Eyes all this
 while, that they made no Discovery of
 this Fraud? Can the Devil so impose up-
 on the Senses, as that, if Men attend,
 they shall not discern his Couzenage,
 and see when he removes Rods, and
 substitutes Serpents in their place? if
 so, how is it possible to judge of Mira-
 cles by the Senses? and if the Senses
 may

may be so deceived, how are we sure that *Moses's* Rod was turned indeed into a Serpent?

B. Why, that seems plain, by his eating up all the other Serpents.

A. Not plain at all, if the Senses are not to be trusted; For he that can remove a Rod from before my Eyes, and bring a Serpent in its stead, and I not see him do it, though I look on all the while, can as easily make me believe he eats that Serpent up, tho' he really touch it not; it is but deceiving the same Sense. To speak what I think, I wonder much, that so many Learned Men should take Pains to solve this Miracle of the Rods, when there remains two others, as hard to be accounted for as that; namely, the turning Water into Blood, and the bringing Frogs upon the Land, as *Moses* did before them; for this the Scripture assures us the *Egyptian* Sorcerers did: And will any one say, this Water was not turn'd into true Blood, nor real and substantial Frogs brought up, but that the Senses of the *Egyptians* were all this while impos'd on by the Craft and Dexterity of the Devil? If any one shall affirm this, the *Egyptian*
Courtier

Courtier will again require, how it came to pass, that his Countrymen's Senses were only to be impos'd upon, and those of the *Hebrews* remain'd clear, and not to be deceiv'd? and I am sure I could not give him an Answer that satisfies my self.

B. But you see that *Jannes* and *Jambres* turn'd but a little Water into Blood, and brought up but a few Frogs; whereas *Moses's* Performances of these kinds, were marvelously great.

A. I do not see that very clearly; but I will take it for granted that so it was, and ask you, Whether it is not, in Nature, as easy to turn six hundred Gallons of Water into Blood, as six Quarts? and to bring up a Million of Frogs, as four and twenty? Out of the way of Nature, all things seem, to me, alike impossible, or alike possible. Bring me a Man or Spirit, that can make a *Fly*, by his own Power, and I will shew you one that can make an *Elephant*. I believe you will own, that had the Water-pots at the Marriage-feast of *Cana* in *Galilee*, held but two or three Pints apiece, the Miracle of Christ the Lord had been as great, as it was, (in turning the Water into Wine) when they con-

contained; each of them, two or three Firkins.

B. I agree with you; and therefore think, as you do, that all such Solutions of Difficulties had better be spared, since they satisfy none that search things thoroughly. But what do you say to this, that the *Sorcerers* could not remove the Plagues they brought upon the Land, which *Moses* did? and therefore you see that *Moses* wrought the greater Miracles.

A. Excuse me, Sir, if I can only see that he wrought *more* than they: For that those he wrought were *greater* than those the *Sorcerers* wrought, is not easy for him to see, who believes it requires as much Power to make a little Serpent, as a great one that can eat him up; to turn *nix* Spoons full of Water into Blood, as six Quarts; and to bring up ten Frogs, as ten thousand.

B. You are then of Opinion, that there is no difference betwixt great and little Miracles; but sure, *more* Miracles will argue a greater Power, than a *few* will. What say you to that?

A. I have already said, that out of the way of Nature, all things are alike possible; and that he who can make an

Eel, can make a *Dragon* if he please ; he who by his own Power can give Ears and Hearing to the Deaf, can as easily restore Sight to the Blind, if he think fit. And as for *more* Miracles arguing a greater Power than a *few*, I must, by my Principles, be perswaded, that more Miracles do not argue a *greater* Power, than a *few*, but argue a longer Use, and more frequent Exercise of the *same* Power : Thus, to turn Water into Blood, is a Miracle, and so it is to turn that Blood into Water again ; I know not which is the greatest ; but he who does them both, works *two* Miracles ; but he who works but *one*, has as great a Power as he who has wrought *two*, because he has the same, tho' not so long continued, or if you will, not so often renewed to him. And tho' the working *many* Miracles will naturally gain greater Authority, yet that is, because more People are concern'd, and come to the knowledge of them ; and they who have seen more, are better assur'd that their Senses were not impos'd upon, than if they had seen but one ; for if they were certainly perswaded, that one was certainly wrought, without Fraud, the seeing more wrought

wrought by the same Person, would give him no greater Authority with them, than he had before. Thus, if you or I should have seen our Child raised from the Dead, we should as fully believe the Person who did it, as if we should see the same Man raise also five more Children from the Dead; but then this Person would gain more Authority with other People, who were related to these five Children, or were Spectators of these great Works. You see I take the Liberty you gave me of making what Objections I can; but it is, that I may receive the greater Satisfaction from your Answers, for it is Truth alone I seek. What Credit therefore could the Miracles of *Moses* give him, when the Magicians wrought the same, in Opposition to his Authority, if three Miracles argue as great a Power as thirty, and those three were attested by the same Senses that the thirty were?

B. I cannot, I assure you, get over all these Difficulties, with as much Ease as other People do, or rather think they do. If those, which the Sorcerers wrought, were true Miracles, they were either wrought by the Power of God,

or of the Devil; if by the Power of God, then God wrought true Miracles to confront the Authority of *Moses*, whose Authority he, at the same time, establish'd by other true Miracles, and so will be found acting in Opposition to his own Designs. If by the Power of the Devil, then can the Devil work true Miracles in Opposition to God, and how shall we come to know which are of God, and which are of the Devil, and consequently, how shall they attest to the truth of any Doctrines, if Powers so opposite can work them? And on the other hand, if the Miracles wrought by the Sorcerers, were only Cheats and meer Illusions of the Senses, how shall we do to distinguish betwixt true Miracles, and appearing ones only, since the Senses, by which alone we can judge, may be so easily impos'd upon, as to take *Appearances* for true and real Miracles? Either of these Suppositions carry Difficulties along with them. I can only promise to do my best to clear what I can of them. I maintain then, *in the first place*, that the Devil himself cannot work a true Miracle independently on God, or by his own innate Power; and this, for Reasons

sons before laid down; *Page 6.* *Secondly*, I assure my self, that he can impose no false ones on our Senses, if we exercise them as we may and should, and take that Care, and use that Circumspection, that it is in our power to do: Because it would be the same thing, for God to permit the Devil to work false and cheating Miracles, and by them, to impose upon our Senses, rightly exercis'd, as to let him work true ones: But of this, I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter. *Thirdly*, I believe that when the wickedest of Men work Miracles, they never do it by a Power deriv'd from the Devil, but are the Instruments which God is pleas'd to use, and have their Power from him alone; for if the Devil cannot himself work Miracles, he cannot commissionate another to do them, nor communicate a Power that belongs not to him. However, I believe that Men are, through their Folly, Ignorance, and great Wickedness, so seduced, as to believe the Devil has such a Power himself, which he can also communicate to them; and that whenever they do any great Matters, they think they do them by a Power deriv'd from that bad Spirit, and

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that they are assisted by him : And because the End these People aim at, is always evil, and the Effects mischievous, the World is also inclin'd to attribute all such Works to the Power of the Devil : Not thinking, perhaps, that this would be, to erect a Power equal, and cor- rival with that of God Almighty ; and forgetting, that God may have his Ends to serve, in permitting very wicked Men to be his Instruments, and to work Miracles, tho' they know nothing of him, nor intend him any Honour, but think, at that time, of serving another Master, and that they act by another's Authority. If my *first* Proposition be true, that the Devil cannot of himself work Miracles, this *third* will follow unavoidably, that others cannot, by any Power deriv'd from him. But this does not hinder me from believing, that God may sometimes use both wicked Spirits, and wicked Men, as his Instruments, and work Miracles by them both, if he please. Upon these Principles I find my self oblig'd to believe, that these *Egyptian* Sorcerers turn'd their Rods into Serpents, the Water into Blood, and brought up Frogs upon the Land, by the Power of God alone, whatever they might think,

think, or by whose Power soever they believed they acted.

A. I am very loath to think otherwise, for the sake of Consequences that I cannot endure: But upon this, I must ask you two Questions. *First*, If these Sorcerers did not believe they could work such wondrous Changes, how came they to be call'd by the King to do them, and how came they to attempt it? One would be inclin'd to think, that their former Successes in this kind, had prepar'd the King to expect it, and embolden'd them to attempt this great Work. *Secondly*, What Account can you give of God's working these Miracles, by the hands of these *Ægyptians*, to confront the Authority of *Moses*, and in opposition to his own Design, which was, by Miracles, to give him Credit with the Court of *Ægypt*, and with his own People?

B. If I could answer these Questions satisfactorily, all Difficulties else, I think, would vanish: But you must be content with the best I can, at present, do. In answer therefore to your first Question, I say, that the *Ægyptians* were, of all Mankind, the most addicted to Enchantments, Sorceries, Predictions,

and all that strange and idle Trade of dealing with the world of Spirits and Powers invisible : I pretend not to know how it came to pass, that they were busied more about these things than other People ; but so we find in all our Histories, that it was in Fact ; and all the World, especially the *East*, endeavour'd to learn these Matters of them, And *Moses* being learn'd in all the Learning of the *Ægyptians*, was, I believe, accounted a Magician also, among them ; as *Daniel* afterwards, and the three Children, by being brought up in the Palace of the King of *Babylon*, and taught the Learning of the *Chaldeans*, (*Dan.* i. 4.) came in time to be reckon'd up with, and accounted amongst, the rest of the *Magicians*, *Sorcerers*, and *Astrologers* of the Realm, and were accordingly consulted upon great Occasions, *Ch.* i. 20. ii. 18. iv. 9. v. 11. *Moses*, I say, being brought up in *Pharaoh's* Court, and (as *St. Stephen* says) *learned in all the Wisdom of the Ægyptians*, which ran exceedingly to *Mathematicks*, *Hieroglyphicks*, and sublime Sciences, was very probably accounted a Magician, even before he made these great Experiments.

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A. This I never considered before; but when I find that he was forty Years old, before it came into his Heart to visit his People, and that he was all that while bred up at Court, and in the *Egyptian* Manners and Learning, I am inclin'd enough to think, he differed very little from other *Egyptian* Students. It is not at all plain what Notions he had of God himself, till God appeared to him; or at least, till he fled from *Egypt*, when being come to Years, (which were forty, by comparing *Exod. ii. 11.* with *Acts vii. 23.*) he through Faith refus'd to be call'd the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter. Considering all these things, I think it not improbable, that the Magicians who knew *Moses*, his Education, Masters, Studies, and Learning in all the *Egyptian* Wisdom, should think him like one of themselves: But I know not what Use you will make of this, supposing it all to be true.

B. No other Use than this, that *Pharaoh* should think the Magicians of his Court equal to *Moses*, and should therefore send for them, to see what they could do; and that the Magicians should believe so too, and thereupon attempt to do

do as he did : They had probably heard, that *Moses's* Rod was turn'd into a Serpent, to convince the Children of *Israel* of his Mission, before he practis'd in the Sight of *Pharaoh* ; and therefore when call'd by him to do the like, they came prepar'd with Rods, and with their muttering Incantations, threw them on the Ground, in the same manner that *Moses* did : And in their other Performances exactly imitated him, as appears from their *stretching out their Rods, and smiting the Dust of the Land*, to bring forth Lice, just as *Moses* did before them. So that I do not see there is any necessity, that their antecedent great Performances, should have dispos'd the King to expect they should work Wonders now, nor have embolden'd them to attempt the doing the like again, whenever call'd upon to do it. But, that thinking themselves in all points as great Men as *Moses* was, they should hope to do all that he did. This I think may be sufficient to account for the Boldness of their Attempt ; I would I could as easily account for the Success of it. 'Tis no great matter for Men of a forbidden Curiosity, ignorant of the ways of God, and brought up in a dreadful

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Superstition, and Perswasion of the Power of Spirits and Demons invisible, to believe they can do great Things by their Invocation, and abominable Rites us'd towards them. But how it comes to pass that God permits them, by such wonderful Events, to continue in their Delusion, is a thing not easy to solve; but yet I will attempt it, in Answer to your second Question, which was, Why God should work three great Miracles by the hands of *Jannes and Jambres*, to confront the Authority of *Moses*, which he establish'd by great Miracles; acting, as it were in Opposition to himself and to his own Design, which was, to give him Credit with the *Hebrews* and *Ægyptians*? I must then premise, *in the first place*, that if no sufficient Reason could be alledged, why God should permit these wicked Sorcerers to work three great Miracles, it would not prejudice the Cause in hand; it would not follow from our Weakness, that he did not actually permit them; the matter of Fact is certain. Nor would it follow, that they wrought them by the Power of Satan, and his Assistance; for that I take for granted, believing firmly that if God had given the

the Devil that Power at large, no Miracles could be of use to testify the Mission of his Prophets. But this would only follow certainly, that God can do himself, and permit others to do, many things, of which we can give no Account, and for which we can assign no sufficient Reason; a Consequence we need not be ashamed of. But, *secondly*, we may conjecture, that God might permit these Sorcerers to work three Miracles, the better to convince them that there was a Power superior to all others, to that of Nature, or whatever Spirits or Demons they had before trusted to, or thought themselves assisted by; for we may well believe, they had never wrought such Miracles before, if any at all; and this Power they might find to be the same that assisted *Moses*, and thereupon might conclude, that this Power was able to deliver the *Hebrews* out of *Pharaoh's* hand, and therefore might persuade the King (who advised with them, and trusted much to them) to let the People go, and sacrifice, as was required. I do not find there is any thing hard or absurd, in supposing these Magicians convinc'd, by the Miracles they wrought themselves, of a
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Divine Power, superior to any they had tried or known before, and that this Power was the same by whose Assistance *Moses* wrought his Miracles, as they did theirs; and this being laid, the rest might follow easily.

A. But, when they came to turn the Dust into Lice, as *Moses* had done, and found they were not able to do it, they cried out, that *this was the Finger of God*: Does not this signify, that they did not, till now, see or believe the hand of God was in it? and consequently, were not convinc'd, that God wrought these three Miracles, either by *Moses* or themselves; but that they came to pass by Art Magic, or they knew not how.

B. There is an Appearance of truth in what you say; but in my Opinion, a little Reason and Observation might suffice to shew them, that the hand of God was full as great in turning Rods into living Serpents, Water into Blood, and bringing up Frogs upon the Land, as in turning Dust into Lice, whose matter may seem much more prepared for such a Change, than that of the other Bodies for the Changes which they underwent. Can any one imagine,
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there is more appearing Difficulty, in turning Dust into Lice, than a little Wand into a Serpent? or can one find, that the doing the first should shew the finger of God visible, and the latter require no such great Power to effect it? I do therefore think, that now was the time they went to *Pharaoh*, to tell him, that the God who wrought these Miracles, was certainly the most powerful of all Beings, and therefore that his Servant *Moses* must be hearkened to, and the *Hebrews* suffered to depart; after they were sufficiently convinc'd themselves, that the Power by which these Miracles were wrought, was able to do what he pleas'd, they endeavour'd to perswade the King, but the Text says, that *he hearkened not unto them*. They found indeed, that they could work no more Miracles; were they *thereby* convinced, that those they had already wrought, were not wrought by God? then must they also think, that those of *Moses* were no better than their own, and consequently were not wrought by God. If they had seen any great difference betwixt the Miracles of *Moses* and their own, they would have seen at first, that the finger of God was in it;

it ; but seeing no such difference, they might well conclude they were both wrought by the same Power, and came to acquaint the King with it. When therefore they say ——— *this is the finger of God*, I would not understand them to mean, *this turning Dust into Lice is the finger of God*, in contradiction to the other foregoing Miracles, as if they shewed no such finger or power of God ——— but ——— this whole Transaction, all this powerful Operation, all these Miracles together, evidently demonstrate, that the hand of God is in this whole matter, and that none but he could bring such mighty things to pass, and therefore it were best to yield to this invincible Necessity.

A. So that you imagine, God permitted these Enchanters to work some Miracles, in order to convince them of his Almighty Power.

B. I do so, and cannot tell how any Man could resist such Evidence: And I think their disappointment in attempting the fourth Miracle, serv'd the better to perswade them, that the foregoing ones could not be wrought by Art Magic, for if they could, they might have still gone on ; for I say again, that

to turn Dust into Lice, has nothing greater, nothing more apt to deterr from undertaking it, than the turning Rods into Serpents, or Water into Blood. But the being stop'd, might only convince them, that the Power which had hitherto assisted them, would no longer do it.

A. Methinks, you quickly turn these Magicians into very good Men.

B. Not so fast I beseech you; for there is no need of thinking better of them, than that coming with impious and diabolical Intentions to overthrow the Authority of *Moses*, they were soon convinc'd both by his, and their own Miracles, that the great God was the Author of them, and went and told the King as much: I know not of any farther Influence these things had upon their Minds. And we find *Ch. ix. 11.* that these Magicians were themselves plagued with the Boils, and could not stand before *Moses*, so that tho' they acknowledged the Power of God, yet they were not thereby made the better Men. You know it is no new thing, for God to serve himself of his Enemies, and to constrain them to confess his Power and Majesty. But this is all
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the difference betwixt me and other People, that *they* make those Enchanters acknowledge the Power and Finger of God, in the turning Dust into Lice; and I make them acknowledge them for *that* and all the Works that went before it; for those they wrought themselves; as well as those that *Moses* wrought. And you must still remember, that I call all this but a *Conjecture*, and am only *guessing* what Reasons might move God to suffer these Enchanters to work three Miracles: And this I thought might pass for one, that they might thereby be convinc'd of his Almighty Power, and Superiority over all the Laws of Nature, that *Moses* might find Credit with them, and the *Hebrews* be suffered to depart, as God commanded. But if this Reason be displeasing or unsatisfactory, let us see what we can make of another, which I will also call but a *Conjecture*; and that is, that God might permit these Sorcerers to work these three Miracles, to harden *Pharaoh's* Heart, and make him still more obstinate in his Resistance and Refusal to let the People go.

A. To tell you the truth, I should be very much troubled, that you should
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make this good, it looks so strangely (to say no worse) on God's part: But I know not how to reject a Truth (if it can be plainly made out) for the sake of an untoward Consequence.

B. It is not for you or me, to make what Truths we like, but to make the best Use we can of what we find made to our hands. Let us look into the History as carefully as may be. *Ægypt* was certainly the Spring and Fountain of Idolatry, the very sink of all impure Abominations both in Worship and in Practice; you cannot read of it in Sacred or Profane Histories, but you will find this Character made good. The King of it, to all his other Wickedness, added the most violent and cruel Oppression of the *Hebrews*, who were also his born Subjects; and certainly, nothing can more provoke a merciful and just God to Anger, than to see a Prince, who is appointed by him to do Justice, and shew Mercy to all his People, and to make them happy under a wise and righteous Administration; to see him exercise his Power in plaguing them, and making them most miserable, by most exorbitant Exactions, and a most rigorous and unjust Oppres-

pression of their Liberties. This was the Case of *Ægypt* and its King, with respect to *Israel*, as you may see *Exod. i. 13, 14. 16.* For these Reasons, God did justly resolve both to punish *Ægypt*, *iii. 7, 8, 9.* and resolve moreover to make his Punishment remarkable, and his Judgments most notorious, that all the neighbouring World might see, and dread the Example. He was now also about to execute his Promise made to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, to give their Seed the Land of *Canaan*, to establish them a People, and set up his Name amongst them. To make them the more remarkable in the sight of all the Nations round, he resolv'd to bring them out of bondage, with an high hand and stretched-out arm, that every one might see the singular Favour he bore to them. And to this end he intended to work great Miracles, which he foresaw *Pharaoh* would harden himself against, but which would make the Deliverance more conspicuous in the Eyes of all the World.

A. I must then allow, you think, that when a Nation has, by its crying Sins and Wickedness, made it self fit

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for God's Judgments, he may, with Justice, execute them upon it, in such a manner as shall tend most to his Glory, the Discouragement of Sin, and the shewing forth his Hatred of it, even by giving them more Opportunities of offending against him, and opposing his Will, altho' he know they will make that Use of his Judgments and Infections.

B. You must; and I hope you see there is no Iniquity in such a Proceeding, supposing these Judgments are justly due, and a Punishment but equal to their Offences. Now all these Miracles that were wrought in *Ægypt*, produced those Judgments that were to punish its Offences; and tho' God certainly knew that they would have no effect on *Pharaoh*, but harden him the more to a Refusal of complying with his Will, yet were they but just Expressions of his Anger, and a just Punishment of their Wickedness. Consider these Plagues by themselves, and you will find them due to the Sins of *Ægypt*; consider them as wrought miraculously, and then they were to let the King and People know, that God was the Author of them, and intended thereby to punish

nish them, and to obtain his Will of them, in case they would not hearken to his Servant *Moses*.

A. But God's foreseeing that these miraculous Judgments would not move the King, but harden his Heart farther, and yet continuing to multiply them, makes it look, as if he designed to harden him the more, to make him fitter for more Judgments.

B. I think not; and if you consider well what has been said, you will find, that God brought upon *Pharaoh* these miraculous Judgments, not to harden him the more, but to shew his Hardness the more, to the World. They were just Punishments for past Offences, and Cautions against farther Obstinacy; and God's knowing that *Pharaoh* would be but the more hardened by them, does not shew that God intended thereby to harden him the more; nor did the Use that God knew *Pharaoh* would make of his Judgments, make it more reasonable for him not to inflict them, when due.

A. I am glad of this, that God did not harden *Pharaoh's* Heart on purpose, by working Miracles; but that he wrought them for other justifiable

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ends, tho' he knew *Pharaoh* would indeed be hardened by them : I may say then, that these miraculous Judgments, were the Opportunities of shewing *Pharaoh's* Heart intolerably hardened, who would not be moved by them : And I may say, that this is the Reason why *God*, in many places of Scripture, is said to harden *Pharaoh's* heart, tho' in as many more, *Pharaoh* is said to harden his own heart. But pray what is all this to his suffering the Sorcerers to work their Miracles ? I am not very clear in the Connexion of these matters : Let it be allowed, that *Moses's* Miracles were wrought for these ends, and *God's* Proceedings justified in dealing with this wicked King and People ; yet what does this relate to the Magicians doing so great Miracles ?

B. The Order and Connexion of things is this. I was conjecturing, that *God*, it may be, might permit the *Ægyptian* Enchanters to work three Miracles, (as he permitted *Moses* to work eleven) that *Pharaoh's* heart being thereby the more hardened, he might carry his Resistance higher, and *God* might gain the greater Glory by the Deliverance of his People, with more astonishing

nishing Signs and Wonders, and the World take much greater Notice of his Power and Majesty. At this you were uneasie, that God should be thought to work Miracles, on purpose, as it were, to harden *Pharaoh's* heart; and I was endeavouring to shew you, that there was no Iniquity in this Proceeding on God's part, because these Miraculous Judgments were but just Punishments of *Pharaoh's* great Wickedness, and impious Obstinacy; and that altho' God knew he would but harden his heart the more under them, yet it would nevertheless be just to inflict them, and God would serve himself of this hardness, to great Purposes. And if this might be allowed of, with respect to *Moses's* Miracles, it might also be allowed with respect to those of the *Enchanters*, whose working Miracles did also harden *Pharaoh's* heart, as appears, *Exod. viii. 19. then the Magicians said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them.* He was neither moved at the Miracles they wrought, nor at the Confession they made, that they were wrought by the finger of God, and the Stop they found to their

working any more. He harden'd his Heart under every thing that was said or done, by them, or *Moses*. I look upon their Case to be much the same with that of *Moses*, so that if God might, with Right and Justice, work Miracles by *Moses*, to harden *Pharaoh's* heart, (in the Sense before mentioned) he might do the same by the Magicians; and it seems to me, a great aggravation of his Obstinate Impiety, that when his own Servants (who came with Minds as ill dispos'd as his) came and told him that the finger of God was in all these Operations, and that they were themselves convinc'd of the truth of *Moses's* Mission, that he should not hearken to them, but harden his heart the more for what they said to him.

A. I yield you that, that *Pharaoh* was a very wicked Prince, but we are now, methinks, come to the force of the Objection that I first made — that *Pharaoh* could not be so much to be condemn'd, for not being convinc'd by the Miracles he saw wrought, by reason he saw them wrought in Opposition to each other. *Moses's* Miracles were to convince the King that he came from

from God; Let us see (says the King) what our own Magicians can do, before we give this Man credit, and let them first be called; you know, that when they came, they did as *Moses* did: Why is *Moses* now to be believed more for his Miracles, than the Magicians?

B. Because the Magicians came themselves to the King, and confess'd, that *Moses* wrought his Miracles by the finger of God.

A. Did they at the same time confess, that they themselves had but cozen'd and impos'd upon him and his Court, and had indeed wrought no Miracles, all the while he thought they had? this Ingenuity might have had some good Effect upon him.

B. Pharaoh, you may be sure, was Judge of that; had they not wrought true Miracles, he could not have hardened his Heart under them, as the Scriptures say he did. The best of your Objection is, that the Miracles the Magicians wrought were true Miracles, and therefore how could the Miracles of *Moses* convince them, when the Magicians wrought true Miracles in Opposition to him? He must therefore be-

believe neither. And the best Answer to this, that I can think on, is this, that the Magicians did as good as confess, that the Miracles they had themselves wrought, were wrought by the same Power of the same God, and to the same Intent that *Moses's* were wrought, namely, to punish *Ægypt* and its King, and to convince them that *Moses* was to be hearkened to, and the *Hebrews* suffered to depart, as God required. For tho' the Magicians came with wicked Dispositions, to set themselves against *Moses*, and used all their wicked Arts and Incantations, Mutterings, and diabolical Ceremonies, to work Miracles equal to those of *Moses*, and might perhaps think at first, that they did what they did, by the assistance of Spirits and Demons, contrary to the God of *Moses*, yet afterwards they might come to see and know, that it was not so, but that they acted by the same Power that *Moses* did, and were only made instrumental to punish *Ægypt* the more. And (as I have already said) their confessing the finger of God to be in all this matter, does as good as confess, that they were now convinc'd of the Power of God, and of the truth
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of *Moses's* Mission, and therefore that the King must let the People go. But the King would now hearken no more to them, than to *Moses*.

A. Why should he? methinks, they deserv'd equal Credit.

B. So they did, and he should have believed them both, attesting the same truth, by Miracles much alike; namely, that *Moses* was sent of God, and wrought Miracles to attest his Mission, and was to be hearkened to.

A. You have given, I confess, a new turn to this Affair, to make the Miracles of the Magicians to attest the truth of *Moses's* Mission, and to make the King more faulty for not believing what his own Enchanters said to him.

B. You see the bottom I go upon; the Scriptures say, that the Magicians confess'd to *Pharaoh*, that the finger of God was in this matter; and the same Scriptures say, that *Pharaoh's* heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; which is a plain Condemnation of such his Obstinacy and Deafness. So that we are not now to consider the Miracles of the Enchanters, as wrought in Opposition to *Moses*, (whatever they themselves at first intended)

tended) but in confirmation of the truth of his Mission, as the Event justified, namely, the Confession of the Enchanters themselves.

A. I perceive that this thing lies at the bottom of your Heart, *viz.* that none but God, and those commissioned by him, can work true Miracles; and therefore you have been at all these Pains, to shew what might move God to permit these Enchanters to work three mighty Miracles: And whether you have hit upon the true Cause or no, I know not; but the Effect I cannot chuse but be pleased withal, namely, the Confession and acknowledgment of God's Power by the Magicians themselves, and the Use God made of it, *viz.* the hardening *Pharaoh's* heart the more; or rather, the Opportunity offered by it, of shewing his heart the more hardened, which God served himself of to gain to himself the greater Glory, and to make his Power the better known, in bringing forth his People; a thing he always has in his View.

B. You take me right; for I can never believe the Devil, or any other, by his Assistance, can work true Miracles, in Opposition to God: Nor can
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I believe that any false ones can be wrought by the Devil or his Agents, so as to impose upon the Senses of a sober, prudent, and attentive Person, where Truth is concern'd. Upon these Grounds I deny, that the Devil wrought these three Miracles by the Magicians; and deny his Power so to impose upon the Senses of *Pharaoh* and all his Court, as to make them believe they were true Miracles, when indeed they were but mere Deceptions and Illusions. And from thence I concluded, that God permitted the Magicians to work three Miracles, of which he made this Use, to extort from them a plain Confession of his Supream Power; and this other, that *Pharaoh's* heart was hereby the more hardened, and his Resistance carried higher, which illustrated the Power of God the more, and the great Favour that he bare unto his People, in delivering them with a stretched-out Arm, and with great Judgments, as he himself is pleas'd to express it, *Exod. vi. 6.*

A. You would have me then, upon the whole matter, believe, that God wrought these great Miracles by the *Ægyptian* Sorcerers, to give *Moses's* Mission

sion credit ; (as indeed their own Confession shews they did) tho' he made other use also of them : So that we must not attend so much to the Mind and Purpose with which these Magicians entered (as it were) the Lists with *Moses*, to confront him, nor to the Imaginations they might have of the great Power by which they wrought some Miracles, as to the *Event* of them, which was their Confession, that the finger of God was in this matter. This, you think, attests to *Moses's* Mission, which is the very end of Miracles you first laid down, which was (you said) to give the Messengers of God credit with those to whom they were sent in his Name. But, Sir, you know it has been all along the Opinion of all the World, that the *Ægyptian* Enchanters wrought their Miracles by the Power of the Devil :

B. I know it very well ; and I grant, you see, that the Enchanters might at first believe so too : But I would have the World undeceiv'd, as well as I think the Enchanters themselves at last were. And pray, when you meet it, will you ask the World these few Questions, which you and I have had between us ?

Ist.

1st. Whether it does not think that the finger of God was as much seen in *Moses's* turning the Rod into a Serpent; the Waters into Blood; and bringing Frogs upon the Land; as in turning the Dust into Lice? 2^{dly}. Whether the Enchanters did not think that they themselves had turn'd their Rods into Serpents, the Waters into Blood, and brought Frogs upon the Land, as certainly as *Moses* had done? and consequently, whether they did not see the finger of God as much in their own Works, as in those of *Moses*? 3^{dly}. Whether the Enchanters would have attempted to have turned Dust into Lice, (as it is plain they did attempt) if they had thought the Finger of God more necessary to perform that Miracle, than the three foregoing ones? 4^{thly}. Whether therefore, upon the whole matter, when they acknowledged the finger of God in the Works of *Moses*, they did not also effectually acknowledge that the same Power had wrought by themselves, those three great Works, altho' they knew it not, nor own'd it, till they were disappointed in their last Attempt? These Questions will take in the whole of what we have been talking concerning

ing the Enchanters. And now I come again to you, to ask you concerning the Power of the Devil, by which you say the World has hitherto suppos'd that these Enchanters wrought their Miracles. Do you so understand it, that the Devil has an inherent Power of his own to work Miracles independently on God, and can commit that Power to other Agents? if you do, you must shew me what difference there is betwixt God and the Devil, in respect to Miracles: and how I shall know which of them acts; or if this cannot be shewn, (as I doubt it much) then we must be to seek of what Use Miracles can be; and I think you will find them to be of none at all.

A. No; But God may permit the Devil to communicate his Power to wicked Agents, who shall work Miracles.

B. Pray what need we go so much about, when the way is so strait to the same Place? Is it not much easier, and much more reasonable to say, that God may see fit to make wicked Men his own Instruments, in working Miracles; than that he permits the Devil to make them *his*? I affirm positively, that if
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the Devil has any Power to work Miracles, he has it from God, and can only exercise it, when God permits him ; and I affirm moreover, that if, at any time, the Devil can give Commission to Men to work Miracles, he can never do it, but when God permits him, and for purposes permitted by God. And pray then is it not as fit, and as likely, that God should give the Magicians Power to work Miracles, as that he should give the same Power to the Devil, and let the Devil give it to the Magicians ? For my own part, I think God's Honour, Justice, and Goodness, are all as safe, when *Men* are his Instruments, as when he uses the *Devil*.

A. But is it not as bad, that God should permit wicked Men to work Miracles, for wicked Purposes of their own ?

B. Not quite so bad, because the World is not so ready to believe wicked Men act by their own Power, as that the Devil does, nor consequently, so liable to be seduced by one of their own Fellow Creatures, as by that powerful subtle Spirit. But, be that as it will, I would have you hence-forwards, make but little reckoning of
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the Instruments God uses in working Miracles, whether good or bad Men, for he has sometimes used both ; and assure your self, that whatever Purposes wicked Men may have, true Miracles can never serve any other Purposes than those of God ; And let the Magicians come with what Purposes they will, 'tis no great matter, they shall be able to do no more than God permits them, to serve his own Designs.

A. But at this rate, the Devil may be an Impotent and harmless Spirit, and wicked Men the Instruments of all Wickedness.

B. The Devil can never be harmless, because his Intentions are evermore malicious, and bent on the doing Mischief to Mankind, *He goeth about, seeking whom he may devour* ; and for his Power or Impotence, it depends entirely on God, how far he will restrain or limit him ; we do not know, how great his Natural Powers, in which God created him, were ; nor how much he lost, by falling from his Innocence and Obedience ; nor consequently how much is, since that, left to him. I am inclin'd to think, that the Supreamest Angel, even in his native Innocence, was not created

created with a Power of changing the Course of Nature, and subverting the known establish'd Laws of the Creation, without the Purpose and Appointment of God, (and with God's Leave and Order a Fly may do it) and tho' the Devil's *Rage* may increase, yet sure his *Power* is not increas'd by his Rebellion and Apostacy. The Scriptures that attribute great matters to him, (which yet by being ill understood are made much greater than they are) do yet inform us that he is absolutely under God's Command; and therefore let his Power be never so great, it must be exercis'd as God permits, and limited, and determin'd to what Purposes God pleases. And will it not from hence follow, that he can no more work a true Miracle, than you or I, of his own accord? And why then, will you think, that wicked Men can work Miracles by the Power of the Devil, *i. e.* Suspend, Change, or Subvert the Course of Nature? for I am now speaking to Miracles alone, according to our Definition, and not to any other Operation, strange, subtile, and amazing, which are said to be wrought by him.

A. You would therefore have me believe, that it is full as reasonable to say, that *Jannes* and *Jambres* (whatever they themselves intended or believ'd) wrought their Miracles by God's Permission, Power, and Appointment; as that God gave this Power to the Devil, and the Devil gave it to *Jannes* and *Jambres*.

B. I would; and promise to be answerable for any Consequences that may follow from this Concession, which would not follow from allowing the Magicians to derive their Power from the Devil, and the Devil his from God. And thus, I have, as well as I could, endeavour'd to shew you, that the end of *Moses's* Miracles, was, to gain Credit to his Mission, that *Pharaoh* and his Subjects, seeing him act by a Power plainly divine, might believe he came from God, and might hearken to the Message he came upon, and comply with it. This would have been without Dispute, had *Moses* only wrought Miracles; but when the Magicians of *Aegypt* also wrought Miracles, in Opposition to *Moses*, then it grew doubtful whether *Moses* or They were to be believed, or neither. And the way to decide this
Affair

Affair was not, as I conceiv'd, to say, (with some) that the Magicians were assisted by the Devil, who came and took their Rods secretly and invisibly away, and substituted true Serpents in their stead; nor (with others) that there was nothing real done by them, but that, by their Sorceries and Enchantments, they deluded the Spectators, and impos'd upon their Senses all the while. These Solutions I thought, created more and greater Difficulties than they pretended to answer to, and were really nothing less than downright *begging the Question in hand*, for severl Reasons laid down before, at large. I have therefore tried to decide this matter, by affirming, that the Magicians (whatever they themselves thought or intended) did really work true Miracles, and were permitted, nay assisted by God, to do so, for Reasons before mention'd, and not to be repeated here; and tried to shew that even these Miracles attested to *Moses's* Mission, and in the Conclusion, did not harden any *Ægyptian's* Heart, so as to make him think the *Ægyptian* Sorcerers wrought Miracles by a Power distinct and opposite to that by which *Moses* acted, which was the only Snare

the *Aegyptians* could fall into, and from which the Sorcerers own Confession manifestly delivered them.

A. I thank you for the Pains you have been at, to clear those Difficulties that stood in the way of my Belief: I am now perswaded that *Moses's* Miracles ought to have gained him that Credit with the *Aegyptians* which God intended him, notwithstanding the Opposition which he was also pleased the Magicians should seem to make to him, by permitting them to work Miracles also; since they themselves who wrought them, came before the King and Court, and acknowledged the Finger of God, and his Power, in all the Operations foregoing, the Consequence of which was plainly this, that *Moses* was sent of God, and must be hearkened to, in whatever he delivered by virtue of this Mission: For tho' he delivered all he had to say, to *Pharaoh*, before he wrought his Miracles, (which is the fairest way) yet all these Miracles were to gain him belief with the Children of *Israel*, in what he was afterwards to say and do among them. I must freely own, that the way you take is less liable to Objections, than any I have ever yet met with;

with ; and I would now give you some Respite, were it not for that Passage in *Deut. xiii. 1, &c.* which sticks so with me, that I shall have no quiet, unless you please to tell me what I must do with it. *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, Saying, — Let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and serve them : Thou shalt not hearken to the Words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams ; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God, with all your Heart, and with all your Soul.* Should it not appear from hence, that God may sometimes permit a false Prophet to give a Sign or Wonder that may come to pass, in order to try whether his People would be tempted to Idolatry ? and if he does, how is it that they must not hearken unto him ? Shall a Miracle confirm the Belief of *One God*, and not confirm the Belief of *more Gods* than One, if wrought for that purpose ? if this be so, a Miracle, in my Judgment, must go for nothing ; but I must believe One God, or more Gods, according

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cording as my Reason leads me; for a Miracle, I see, proves both alike.

B. You have objected right; but supposed amiss, that the *Sign* or the *Wonder* here spoken of, was a *Miracle*; for no such thing appears. To give a *Sign* or *Wonder*, is, in this place, to foretel some wonderful thing to come to pass, and then it runs thus — If a Man should pretend to have a Message from God delivered to him in a Vision, or that God had appeared to him in a Dream, and reveal'd his Will to him, and, to gain to himself Credit, should foretel some strange and unexpected thing, and the Event should confirm his Prediction, and the Sign or Wonder come to pass; and upon this, should persuade the People to forsake the Worship of One God; he should not however be believed; the Accomplishment of his Prediction should not gain him so much Credit, as upon his Persuasion to fall into the Worship of many Gods. For tho' God could prevent the Accomplishment of this Prediction, yet he may not always see Reason so to do, but may suffer this Sign or Wonder to come to pass (which would have come to pass without any such Prediction)

ction) to see whether People would be so easily seduced into the grossest of Errors, because a Wretch has foretold some strange thing, that God had purpos'd should come to pass, whether foretold or no. For you have no reason at all, to believe that God permits this Sign or Wonder to come to pass, only to fulfil the Prediction, and try the People's Faith and Constancy; but, that this Sign or wonderful Event is intended by God, and that he will not put it by, tho' it be foretold by one who pretends to be warned of God, and will prove an occasion of tempting People to Idolatry. I take this visionary Dreamer here mentioned, to be but a meer Gueßer, and to predict Events of his own head, some of which may possibly come to pass. But if we should suppose him a true Prophet, and that God inspir'd him with the Knowledge of future Events, which he predicted, and which came to pass; yet if he should persuade the People to Idolatry, he were no longer to be trusted, because we may be sure, the Spirit of God must then depart from him, for God cannot contradict himself, nor do any thing to persuade Men to forsake him, and give
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his Worship to another. This is the plain Meaning of the thing, that if a Prophet whom God had sometime since honoured with an Inspiration or two, should afterwards, upon the Credit of his former Inspiration, perswade to Idolatry, the People should not remember what he *had been*, but consider what he *now was*, and put him to death, because it is impossible he should have been inspired of God, to such a purpose as this. And if we should (with some) suppose this Sign or Wonder, to have been, the working a Miracle, yet this is the Solution of the matter, that no Man, tho' he had formerly wrought Miracles, should upon the Credit of them, be believ'd when he talk'd absurdly, or be followed, when he perswaded to any thing plainly wicked: Which was the Case of *Judas*, and perhaps some others, who had sometimes wrought Miracles by Christ's Commission, and yet did after renounce him, and apostatise from the Faith. Their having been used by God as his Instruments and Messengers, did not authorise them for ever after to be accounted such, nor was to give them Credit, in every thing they said or did.

A. I must not therefore (you say) understand this Passage in *Deut. xiii.* so, as if God at any time, purely to try his People's Faith, and Adherence to his Worship, would inspire a Prophet with the Knowledge of some great Event, which he should foretel, and which should come to pass, and then should perswade them to fall from his true Worship; and much less that he should let him work a true Miracle, in order so to tempt the People.

B. By no means; for this would be to tempt People to fall from God, by the same Methods he us'd to keep them upright; and to confirm the Belief of Idols, by the same Course he took to perswade them of the Unity of the Godhead, namely, by Miracles; which would be building and pulling down with the same hand. You see what a monstrous Absurdity there is in this, that the *One* and only true God, should let a Man work a Miracle, to perswade Men, there were many Gods. They who think that God would ever so tempt his People, will be at a loss to find how it is possible for him, ever to undeceive them: A Miracle cannot do it, for 'twas a Miracle led them
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into Error, and unhing'd them from the true Belief of one God. I will be bold to say, that this is a Temptation, from which there is no way to escape. And therefore they who explain this Passage after this manner, must necessarily give up all Miracles, as good for nothing, that is, to prove nothing. For if a Miracle prove the Unity of the Godhead, it can never prove plurality of Gods; and if it can prove plurality of Gods, it can never prove the Unity.

A. But wherein then, may God be said to tempt that People, by this false Prophet?

B. By permitting that Sign or Wonder to come pass, which was foretold by him (tho', it may be, not foreknown by him) upon whose Credit he shall try to perswade to Idolatry: This, God could prevent if he saw fit, and, by not preventing, suffers this Temptation to be laid for such as will be so foolish and so absurd as to fall into it. God, I have said, does not lay this Snare for any one, but the Course of his Providence, may not, perhaps, suffer him (much less will Justice constrain him) to remove it, altho' he see that

that wicked People will be seduced by occasion of it. He had given them sufficient Proofs of the Unity of his Godhead, sufficient Cautions against Idolatry, and he will now try, if a lucky Guess, or a sagacious Prævision, or an impudent Pretence of Prophecy, coming to pass, and notably fulfilled, shall over-rule all Reason, and positive Command, and be able to seduce them to Idolatry. If this be a Temptation, God will venture it, as well he may; He will permit this Sign or Wonder to come to pass, and will not go out of his appointed Course to hinder it, that he may see, whether his People will remember and obey his Warnings and his Precepts. I do not see there is any great matter in this Passage: Nor do I see, how Miracles are at all concern'd in it. For I can never think that God should enable a Man to work a Miracle, and then appoint him to be put to death for doing it, as we find it *Deut.* xiii. 5.

A. No, Sir, he is not to dye, for working a Miracle, but for enticing to Idolatry, by vertue of having wrought that Miracle: 'Tis for the bad Use he makes of it.

B. You

B. You say right, but he could not have had such a powerful Pretence to seduce to Idolatry, had not God enabled him to work that Miracle. And you know this Passage is brought to shew us, that God, to try his People, permits a Man to work a Miracle, in order to seduce them, if they will be so seduc'd. If it be, as you suggest, that God, for some other good and wise end, permits a Man to work a Miracle, and he perverts it to this wicked Purpose, and makes use of the Authority it gives him, to draw Men to the Worship of Idols, then is there no Tryal or Temptation on God's part, but an abuse of a Miracle by a very wicked Man, which seems to be contrary to the Sense that is generally put on this Passage in *Deut. xiii.* which is, you know, that God to try his People, permits a Man to work a true Miracle. But now if this Miracle were wrought for any other purpose, than to give this Man Credit, God could not be said to try his People by it, altho' his People would indeed be accidentally tried by it, *i. e.* the false Prophet would take occasion from this Miracle, to seduce the People to Idolatry, a thing which God intended not,

not, but which was an accidental Use of it, after it was over. If God indeed, after this Prophet had endeavour'd to entice the People to Idolatry, had given him the Power of working a Miracle, he had in some sense tempted his People by that Miracle, for then his Miracle had given him Credit, in what he should afterwards deliver as his Doctrine: Whereas to work a Miracle first, and then to build any Doctrine or Worship on the credit of it, is always liable to Suspicion; because the Miracle might have been wrought for other Uses, and you endeavour, without any good proof, to put it to this, which is for your present purpose. For it is my Opinion, that the Doctrine, in general at least, should always be first laid down, and then the Miracle be wrought to give the Messenger Authority and Credit to establish it in People's Minds; which would prevent all manner of Abuses of any Accidental Miracles. But I foresee, that, when I come to speak to the Miracles of our Lord Christ, I shall be under a necessity of handling this matter more at large, and therefore, if you please, we will refer it to that place; for I have already, I fear, offended too much, in repetition of the same matter.

A. Sir,

A. Sir, I account my self oblig'd to you, as much for that, as any thing else, and hope I understand things much the better for it, and shall the better keep them in my Mind. You will be pleased, at some convenient time, to let me renew this Conversation, and hear the rest.

B. You will be very welcome, when you please: Only remember, that you take not what I say, on trust, till you have both examin'd, and digested it, and are throughly satisfied. I am, you may be sure, proud of the Respect you have for me, but you must be no looser by it, nor let it hinder you from bringing all the Objections you can muster up from all Quarters.

AN
 ESSAY
 UPON
 MIRACLES.

In Two Discourses

DIALOGUE II.

A. I Am come, Sir, if it be seasonable, to take the advantage of your last Offer, of speaking to the Miracles of *Christ* our Lord in the manner you spake to those that were wrought by *Moses*: And to ask of you the same liberty you then allowed me, of making what Exceptions I could, to any thing you said, and asking what Questions I thought were pertinent.

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B. 'Tis

B. 'Tis seasonable enough; and the greater liberty you take, the greater is like to be your Satisfaction, if it be in my power to give it you. The Method I shall take, if you approve it, will be this,—— *First*, to shew you, that it was expected, that the *Christ*, or the *Messiah*, should work Miracles. *Secondly*, That *Jesus* did actually work Miracles. And *Thirdly*, Speak to the *End* for which, he said himself he wrought them. Under one or another of these Heads, you will find room for what Objections shall occur to your mind. *First*, therefore, I will shew you that it was expected, the *Christ* should work Miracles. Upon our Saviour's feeding five thousand Men, with five barley Loaves, and two small Fishes, it is said, *John vi. 14. Then those Men, when they saw the Miracle that Jesus did, said, of a truth, this is that Prophet, that should come into the world.* It was not usual for every Prophet, who was sent of God, to work Miracles; nay, very few of them wrought any; so that to expect a Prophet that should work Miracles, was to expect a great Prophet indeed; and greater much than any they had seen, excepting *Moses*, and *Elijah*,

lijah, and Elisba. And it were easy to shew, if it were needful, that this Expectation of the *Jews*, is a proof that they look'd for that particular Prophet, foretold by *Moses* in *Deut.* xviii. 18. that promised a Prophet that should be like to *Him*, as in many other particulars, so especially in working Miracles; for he could be like him in nothing more to the honour, and to the purpose of a Prophet. The *Jews* therefore, because they expected a Prophet like to *Moses*, concluded from *Christ's* Miracles, that he was *that Prophet that should come into the World.* This Expectation of Miracles, appears also from those many Demands the *Jews* made to *Christ*, of shewing them some Signs. *Master, we would see a Sign from thee,* *Matth.* xii. 38. and *Joh.* vi. 30. *What Sign shewest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?* this was occasioned by *Christ's* telling them, *v.* 29. *that they should believe on him, whom God had sent;* but they requir'd some Sign, in proof that God had sent him: This signifies that they expected such an Exercise of Divine Power, in him who should be sent of God: And so *Christ* tells the *Jews*, *Ex-*

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cept ye see Signs and Wonders, ye will not believe. Thus *Job. vii. 31.* Many of the People believed on him, and said, when Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man hath done? And *Matth. xii. 23.* when he had restor'd the blind and dumb possess'd, to Sight and Speech—— the People were amaz'd and said, is not this the Son of David? These are full Proofs that the Jews expected Christ or the Messiah, whenever he appear'd, should work Miracles. The Answer he made to the Disciples of *John Baptist*, is a Proof that this Expectation of the Jews was well grounded, being rais'd by a Prophecy. *John* was now in Prison, and there had heard of the Works that Christ did, and sent two of his Disciples, who said to Christ, *Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?* It appears, that *John Baptist* knew Christ very well, before he baptized him; that he saw and bare Record, that he was the Son of God; that he called him, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the Sins of the World; that he saw the Spirit of God descending on him, like a Dove, and abiding on him, and heard the Voice from Heaven, that said

said, *this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* All this was done, before *John* was cast into Prison; and therefore 'tis not to be thought, he sent for Information, as tho' he had not known himself that *Jesus* was the *Christ*, or any ways doubted of it. But he sent this Message by such as wanted Confirmation of their Faith, and would not ('tis likely) take their Master's bare word, that he whom *John* baptized was the *Messiah*. Their Master was a Prisoner, and in danger of dying a violent Death; would the *Messiah* suffer that? Was that the Favour his Fore-runner must expect? Was it likely the *Messiah* should be such a one as *Jesus*? These Doubts, or the like, might vex the Minds of *John's* Disciples; and therefore to deliver them from them, and to give them truer Notions of the Person and Office of the *Messiah*, to satisfie themselves and others they should meet withall, he sends them to *Jesus* himself with the foresaid Question — *i. e.* to enquire, whether he were the Person *that was to come*, or whether they must look for another. To which our Lord answers — *Go and shew John again, those*

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things

things which ye do hear and see ———
the Blind receive their Sight, and the
Lame walk, the Leapers are cleansed,
the Dead are raised up, and the Poor
have the Gospel preached unto them. All
these Particulars are found in *Isaiah*
xxix. 18. xxxv. 5, 6. lxi. 1. and are
so many Prophecies of the Works of
the Messiah; for it is to be observ'd,
that the Satisfactoriness of our Lord's
Answer to these Disciples, consists in
this, that it had been foretold and ex-
pected, that He *who was to come*, should
do these Miracles. You come from *John*
to learn whether I am He who was to
come ——— go back and tell him of
the Works you see Me do, and hear
that I have done: And if these Works
betoken and delineate Him *that was to*
come, let him judge of me as he sees
fit. This shews, that the great mark of
him that was to come, was, that he should
work great Miracles.

A. I agree, Sir, to all this, but what
Use am I to make of it?

B. To observe, and remember, upon
Occasion; that it was foretold by Pro-
phets, and expected by the *Jews*, that
whenever Christ, or the Messiah, came
into the World, he should work great
and

and many Miracles. The like thing never happened to any Man living besides. It was never foretold by a Prophet, of any particular Person, nor expected by any People, that such or such a certain Man should work Miracles, when he came and lived in the World: This Honour was peculiar to our Lord Jesus.

A. I will reserve this Observation, for the *Jews*, when I meet them, for I think it is good there; but, as yet, I do not see what to do with it, to such as believe the *Old Testament* no more than they do the *New*. Will you be pleased to go on, to shew how he fulfilled these Prophecies, and satisfied the Expectations they had raised among the People.

B. This matter will not need much proof; those on whom Jesus wrought Miracles, did freely, and openly, and gratefully acknowledge their Benefactor, and owned they received their Sight, or Hearing, their Health, or Strength, from him that was called *Christ*; and so did many of their Relations: And some of the *Jews*, for the sake of these great Works, did own he was the *Christ*; But because that was not safe for them.

to do, many that did not, or would not know he was indeed the *Christ*, yet owned the Benefits received, to have been bestowed by Him, who was *called* Christ, and *Jesus of Nazareth*: They bore witness to the Person, tho' they might not know who that Person was. Thus far we may be sure, that the *Jews*, who were the Subjects of our Saviour's Miracles, and many of their Relations, would go, they would testify that he actually wrought Miracles. This was also confessed by his greatest Enemies; those who were griev'd, and angry to think he had such Power, yet could not deny but that they knew he exercis'd such Power. *What do we*, said the Priests and Pharisees, in Council, *for this Man doth many Miracles?* And even their blasphemous attributing them to the Prince of the Devils, and his Assistance, does as fully prove the matter of Fact, namely, that they were done, as if they had believed he wrought them by Divine Power, and had so acknowledged it. For the Question is not here, whose Power he wrought them by, but whether they were wrought or no, by Him as the Instrument; and therefore their blas-

blasphemous Calumny, is as good an Evidence, that Miracles were wrought by *Jesus*, as any his own Disciples could have given. It appears therefore from the Testimony of his Followers and Disciples, and of those who were neither, but only cur'd and restor'd by him, and of those who hated him, and persecuted him to Death, that *Jesus Christ* did truly work great Miracles; which was the *Second thing* I propos'd to speak to.

A. I acknowledge, Sir, that I know not how any matter of fact can be better prov'd, than this, that our Saviour wrought Miracles. But would you have me, believe, and (if call'd upon) maintain, that every great Work our Saviour wrought, was properly miraculous?

B. I see no Reason to believe otherwise; but because we have describ'd a Miracle, as a Work of God, subverting, changing, or suspending the known Course, and settled Laws of Nature; and appealing to the Senses — and that some Works our Saviour wrought, may not appear to us, to come up fully to this Description; it may be fit, perhaps, not to maintain that

that they were every one of them, properly miraculous; tho' we indeed believe they were. I can believe that of Christ, which I cannot of another Man, altho' I see the same Effect produc'd; because the same Effect may proceed from different Powers and Causes. And because another Man may seem to do, without a Miracle, what Jesus Christ really did by Miracle; therefore I need not maintain, to an Adversary, that every Work he wrought was properly miraculous, altho' I verily believe it was. The Miracles which I would most insist upon, should be, His turning Water into Wine; His walking on the Seas; His feeding five thousand People, with five Loaves, and two small Fishes; and his raising up the Dead, and some such like.

A. I allow that these are incontestable Proofs of a Divine Power; but I cannot methinks, afford to part with any *other* Miracles of Christ, tho' seemingly much less.

B. Nor I neither; let us part with nothing but our Mistakes; Were you ever at Sea, and observ'd how suddenly the most furious Winds have been laid, and how almost in an instant, a
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Calm has succeeded to a great Storm?

A. Yes.

B. And what if some bold Passenger, had, at that Instant, *rebuked the Winds*, and bid them cease, and they had ceased immediately? would you have concluded presently, that such an Event was miraculous; or would you have thought, the Man had spoken audaciously and luckily?

A. Audaciously and luckily, since the Winds might have then ceased, tho' he had held his Tongue.

B. But if you had seen our Saviour Christ do the same thing, in the same manner, you would have concluded, *He* had exercis'd a Divine Power; and yet the Event is alike in both Cases; but you know how different Persons they were. When therefore you dispute with Unbelievers about Miracles, I should not advise you to insist upon any such Events, as might have naturally come to pass, altho' you are fully perswaded, that those particular ones were truly miraculous. Make use rather of such, as are subject to no Exceptions, and where Chance can have no room. Do you now understand, that I would have you believe, that
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all the great Works, that Christ wrought, were truly miraculous, but that you need not try to prove them to be so, to such as will deny it. This is all I mean, by distinguishing such Works of Christ as both appeared, and were, miraculous, from such as *were* miraculous, but might not *appear* to be so.

A. I apprehend you; and desire you to proceed to *the third thing* you intended to shew, namely, the *End* and Purpose for which Christ said himself he wrought Miracles.

B. The end for which Christ wrought Miracles was plainly this, that for their sake, he might be believed to come from God, and that what he should deliver as God's Will, was certainly so. The bottom of all which, you know is this, that a Miracle being a work that none can do, unless God be with Him, it is not believed that God will entrust this miraculous Power, with one that should abuse it, to the deceiving or hurting any innocent Person: And therefore where we hear a Man declare he comes from God, to teach his Will, and see him, in Confirmation of such his Mission, work Miracles, we believe;
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not only that he comes from God, but also that what he declares to be the Will of God, is truly so. The Miracles of Christ were wrought to testify he came from God, and that the World might believe what he delivered from him. Let us hear himself, appealing to the Miracles he wrought, as to so many Evidences of his Commission. *I have, saith He, greater witness, than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish; the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me,* Joh. v. 36. and in x. 24, 25. *When the Jews came round about our Lord and said to him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, bear witness of me. And John xv. 24. If I had not done amongst them, the Works which none other Man did, They had not had Sin. And in Joh. x. 37, 38. If I do not the works of my Father believe me not; but if I do, tho' you believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him. See also Joh. xi. 15. and xiv. 11. These are the Places, where Christ him-*

himself declares, that this was the End for which he wrought his Miracles, that Men might believe by them, that God had sent him; and that without these Works the Jews might have had some Excuse for their Infidelity. You shall now see him shew you the Use of Miracles, in a Case that will be worth your remembering. In *Mark ii. 3, &c.* *And they came unto him, bringing one sick of the Palsy, which was born of Four, and when they could not come nigh unto him for the Press, they uncovered the Roof where he was, and when they had broke it up, they let down the Bed, wherein the Sick of the Palsy lay. When Jesus saw their Faith, he said unto the Sick of the Palsy, Son, thy Sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the Scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their Hearts — Why doth this Man thus speak Blasphemies, Who can forgive Sins but God only? and immediately when Jesus perceiv'd in his Spirit, that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Our Saviour does not here blame them for thus reasoning with themselves, for certainly they reasoned right, that none but God could forgive Sins; and it was no great matter to mis-*
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take, and think that Christ attributed such Power to himself, by pronouncing so absolutely — *that his Sins were forgiven him*; and such a Power they never knew committed to any Man: He does not therefore blame them, for so reasoning, but takes occasion from thence, to shew them *Who he was*, and the Power he had committed to Him, and for what Purpose: And therefore he goes on — *Whether is it easier to say to the Sick of the Palsy, thy Sins are forgiven thee, or to say — arise and take up thy Bed, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath Power on Earth to forgive Sins, I say unto thee* [speaking then to the Sick of the Palsy] *Arise, take up thy Bed, and go thy way unto thy House.* Consider with your selves this matter. You heard me lately tell this sick Man, that his Sins were forgiven him, and thought immediately that I had spoken impious and blasphemous Words, attributing to my self a Power plainly Divine, and incommunicable, *i. e.* of forgiving Sins. That God alone can forgive Sins, committed against himself, is certainly true; but if you think He cannot communicate this Power, you are mistaken;
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for I assure you, that the Son of Man, even I who speak to you, have Power on Earth to forgive Sins, and I was exercising this good Power upon this miserable Paralytick, which was, you know, the Occasion of your inward Reasoning, and concluding me to have blasphemed. And what think you? You see this poor Creature, how impotent and weak he lies before you, how altogether unable he is to stir, and help himself. Don't you believe it is as easy for God to give me the Power of forgiving Sins, as it is to give me the Power of working miraculous Cures? May I not say as easily — *thy Sins are forgiven thee* — as I can say — *Arise, take up thy Bed and walk*? If I, without any application of proper means, or any manner of Prescription, shall cure this Man of his Distemper, by the bare word of my Mouth, by saying only, *Rise, take up thy Bed and walk*, will you believe that I have also Power to forgive Sins, since one is full as easy as the other? Now, that you may know assuredly, that I the Son of Man, have Power on Earth to forgive Sins, you shall see that I have Power to cure this
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Paralytick presently ——— I say unto thee then, thou lame and helpless Creature, arise, take up thy Bed and walk, and go thy way unto thy House. Whether his Sins be truly forgiven him, according to my word, is what you cannot possibly discover; but whether I have Power to cure this Man's Disease, the Effect will shew immediately, and you will visibly discern. And immediately he arose and took up the Bed, and went forth before them all, insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it on this fashion. Here is an Act of great Mercy, shewn to a poor miserable Man; but 'tis plain, that Christ's Design was now to shew the Jews, the truth of that Doctrine, that the Son of Man had Power to forgive Sins. That was the thing the Jews stumbled at, and this was the way Christ took to set them right; the Miracle was to procure an Attention and Belief; the visible effect of a Divine Power was to convince them that what he said was true, altho' the effect (namely the forgiveness of Sins) was, and must be invisible. This Inference is, you see, of our Saviour's own making, and is a lively Demonstration, that

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true Miracles are design'd by God, to bear Testimony to the Mission of his Messengers and Prophets, and to establish and confirm the truth of what they deliver, by virtue of such Mission. You now see, by an Instance, how our Lord himself appeals to his own Miracles, and sure you will believe he knew the true use that was made to be of them.

A. There is no want of farther Authority, where we have that of Christ: But if you please let me also be remembered of what the Writers of Scriptures say upon this head.

B. St. John then says xx. 30, 31. *Many other Signs, truly did Jesus, in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book, (i. e. St. John's Gospel) but these are written that ye might believe, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, Ye might have Life in his Name.* St. Luke also in Acts ii. 22. reports St. Peter's words to the Jews — *Ye Men of Israel hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God, by Miracles and Wonders, and Signs, which God did by Him, in the midst of You, as Ye Your selves also know.* You shall hear

hear also what is said of the Apostles, because it tends to the same Purpose, namely, that God intended to give their Doctrine (the same that Christ taught) Credit, by the Miracles he enabled them to work. Thus then St. Mark xvi. 20. *And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.* Thus Acts xiv. 3. *Long time therefore abode they, speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave Testimony unto the Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by their Hands.* Thus Heb. ii. 4. *God also bearing them witness, both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost.* See also Acts viii. 6, 7.

A. Methinks, there can be nothing plainer in the World, than that God purposed to give his Son Jesus, and his Apostles, Credit with the People to whom they were sent, by giving them the Power of working Miracles, *i. e.* God intended the People should believe Christ, and his Apostles, declaring the will of God upon the account of the Miracles they saw them work, which Works no Man could

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do, excepting God were with him. Let us hear, if you please, what was the Issue.

B. Mind not what *was* the Issue, but what in Reason *should have been*, when God bestowed this Power of Miracles, on purpose to attest to the Mission of his Son. The Issue was, that many believed on him, when they saw the Miracles he did, but a great many more believed not. When *Elijah* ii. *Kings* xvii. had restored by his Prayers the Woman's dead Child to life again, *she said, Now by this I know that thou art a Man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth, is truth.* And thus *St. John* ii. 11. *This beginning of Miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his Glory, and his Disciples believed on Him.* And vi. 14. *Then those Men, when they had seen the Miracle that Jesus did, said, this, is of a truth, that Prophet that should come into the World,* i. e. they believed him to be the Christ, as hath been before observ'd. And ix. 32. *Since the World began, was it not heard, that any Man opened the Eyes of one that was born blind; if this Man were not of God he could do nothing.* i. e. He could do no such might-

mighty Miracles. And thus upon his raising up the Widow's Son of *Nain* from the Dead ——— *Luke vii. 16.* *There came a Fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, that a great Prophet is risen up among Us, and that God hath visited his People.* But yet you know, that much the greatest part of the *Jews* continued unbelieving, notwithstanding all these Miracles; so that you must rather look to the intended Issue, than that which really followed.

A. Pray, can you possibly account for the *Jewish* Infidelity, under the manifestation of so much Power, as Christ exercised, and notwithstanding so many Miracles wrought among them?

B. A great many Reasons might be assign'd, tho' none sufficient; but that which seems the strongest, and which is most to the purpose in hand, seems to me, to be this. That the *Pharisees* and leading Men among the *Jews*, had spread it abroad among the common People, that he dispossessed *Demoniacs*, by *Beelzebub* the Prince of the Devils: This was the Judgment, you know, they passed upon his healing one possessed with a Devil, blind and dumb, *insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and*

saw. Matth. xii. 22. And in all likelihood, they passed the like Judgment on his other miraculous Works; for it was a constant Tradition with the *Jews*, that *Jesus* was a great *Magician*; and I wish it were at this day altogether worn out of the minds of that poor People. Now if the *Jews* were made to believe, that he wrought his Miracles by the assistance of the Devil; 'tis plain his Miracles could never give him any credit with them; if once they were perswaded, that he acted by Commission of God's declared Adversary, how could his Miracles attest to his Commission from God? if *Jesus*, in combination with Evil Spirits, shall restore the Dumb to Speech, and the Blind to Sight, it will be to no purpose to tell them he comes from God, and in witness of his Mission, shall cure the Blind and Dumb. The very means he uses to convince the People, he comes from God, are turn'd upon him, and perverted to the utter discrediting of all he says. This ascribing to the Power of the Devil, the Miracles he wrought by the Spirit of God, he calls himself, *the sinning against, and blaspheming the Holy Ghost*. 'Tis true, the malignity of the
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Pharisees Sin did lie in pronouncing thus publickly, that he acted in concert with the Devil, tho' they were inwardly perswaded otherwise, as People think : But, to believe the Devil could indeed assist any one, in restoring to the Dumb their Speech, and Sight to the Blind, and do other so great Works, was the first Snare they fell into, and would easily throw them into the other ; and the People could never have been induced to believe that Jesus wrought great Works by the assistance of the Devil, unless they had been first taught, that the Devil could work great Works himself, and also communicate such his Power to Men : This was the fundamental Error with which their Minds were first seasoned, and which prepar'd them for the other blasphemous Opinion of our Lord's being assisted by that wicked Spirit : If this be a Digression, you owe it to your Question, whether I could account for the *Jewish* Infidelity, under so many Miracles, and so evident a Demonstration of the Spirit.

A. I am content with it ; and desire you would now take the pains to recapitulate, as you have heretofore done,

what hath been already said upon the whole matter, touching the Miracles of Christ our Lord.

B. The Sum then, of what I have been trying to prove, is this; That it was foretold by the Prophets, that *He who was to come, the Christ, or the Messiah*, should work great Miracles, and that it was expected by the *Jews* he should do so. This I said, was peculiar to our Lord, and what never happened to any one else. Next, That *Jesus* of *Nazareth* did actually work great Miracles, and by them proved himself the Christ, and was received as such by those who closely attended to his Works. And lastly, that *Jesus* himself told the *Jews* that God had given him the Power of working Miracles, on purpose to convince the World, that he came from God, and was the Christ, and was to be believed in what he should deliver touching God, Himself, and the Life he would have Men lead; that Miracles were his Credentials, and that, upon their score, he requir'd them to look upon him as the Messenger and Prophet of God, and his Ambassador, for the purposes he should declare, and communicate to them.

A. I do not know that any thing can be plainlier proved from Scriptures, than these three Points; and must I not hereupon make this Consequence; that the Doctrine of *Jesus Christ* is true, and ought to be believ'd, because it was prov'd, establish'd, and confirm'd by Miracles?

B. That Consequence is unavoidable, and makes it self.

A. I have always made it in my mind; but I have so often seen it overthrown by Writers of all sorts, both antient, middle-aged, and modern, very good Christians all, and doubtless very learned, that I know not what to think of it. What (for example) must I do, when I am told, that I must not judge of the truth of a Doctrine, by the Miracles that are wrought in confirmation of it, but must judge of Miracles, by the Doctrine they would establish? Is not this downright *begging the Question*? Is it not a Maxim directly contrary to what *Jesus Christ* established? Did not he affirm that his Miracles were to attest to the truth of what he should deliver? Did he not cure the Paralytick (as you shewed) on purpose to shew that what he had said of the Son of

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of Man's having Power to forgive Sins, was true, and ought to be believed?

B. I agree with you, that that Maxim is not solid; and that if it were so, Miracles would prove nothing that were doubtful or unknown before. We must judge, it seems, whether the Doctrine to be establish'd, be true, and reasonable, and fit to be believed, before we can believe a Miracle could be wrought to establish it. This Miracle can give this Doctrine no credit, but rather receives it from the Doctrine; it is, as you call it, *begging the Question*.

A. What must I do, moreover, with those People, who affirm that the Devil can also work great Miracles, and can assist wicked Men also in working them, *i. e.* can communicate his Power to them? For, to tell you what I think, this Power, to a Man of my Simplicity and plainness of Understanding, seems to make void the purpose of our Saviour, and the end for which he said he wrought Miracles, *i. e.* to gain belief to his Doctrine. For if the Devil can work Miracles, as well as *Jesus Christ*; and Men assisted by the Devil, as well as Christ's Disciples; what Proof can Miracles make that a Doctrine is from God?

B. Why,

B. Why, that will bring you back again, to consider the Doctrines to which these Miracles pretend to attest.

A. So it will; but then Miracles will signify nothing, nor determine me one way or other; but I shall consider whether this Doctrine be reasonable, and fit to come from God or no, and shall believe, according to the best of my Reason and Judgment, without regard to Miracles. I think I have heretofore learned thus much from you: and the more I consider this matter, the more fully perswaded I am, that we are in the wrong, to think the Devil can work true Miracles, or help any one to do so. But tho' I am thus assured, when I consider things naturally, and according to the best of my Reason; yet there are two Passages in the new Testament, that, when they recur to my mind, put me very hard to it; and if you please to let me object them, and whatever else my Mind shall suggest from them, and give me your Solutions, I shall be oblig'd; for they start the same Difficulties, in the Case of Christ's Miracles, as the three Miracles wrought by the Magicians did in the Case of *Moses's*.

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B. The first, I guess, is that Passage *Matth. xxiv. 24.* where our Lord says, — *There shall arise false Christs, and false Prophets, and shall shew great Signs and Wonders, insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.* And if this be so, you will say, unless Men can distinguish betwixt the Miracles of these false Christs, and those of the true One, how shall they do to discern the true Christ and his Doctrine from the false Doctrine of the false Christs.

A. I shall, indeed, say so, and I shall ask that Question. For if by *great Signs and Wonders* here mentioned, I must understand *great and true Miracles*; then does our Lord appear to me to say — I, by working great and true Miracles have proved my self to be the Christ, the true Messiah; the time will shortly come, when others shall arise, and call themselves Christ, and to prove they are so, shall work great and true Miracles: But I give you warning beforehand, not to mind them, or believe them, for I only am the true Christ, and have so prov'd my self, by great and true Miracles. Would you have me believe that Christ meant thus, and that

that he so plainly beg'd the Question in hand? and yet I know not how to avoid this, if by *great Signs and Wonders*, we must understand *great and true Miracles*. This it is that sticks with me; and therefore pray tell me, what I must do?

B. Why, you must still maintain, that by *great Signs and Wonders*, we are not to understand *great and true Miracles*; for if *Miracles* will prove one Man to be *Christ*, the like *Miracles* will prove another Man to be so to, *i. e.* they will prove neither of them the *Christ*. Nor is there any great matter in foretelling that false *Christs* and false *Prophets* would arise, and work *Wonders*, this is not enough to keep us from regarding, or believing them, if they truly work *Miracles*; because it is so easy a matter for any one that sets up a new *Doctrine*, to bid his Followers beware of any one that should oppose it, tho' with never so specious *Doctrines*; and to tell beforehand that some would certainly rise up, and contradict such *Doctrines*, would be but a very reasonable and likely Guess, because we see it has been, and continually is, the Fate of all *Philosophy* and *Doctrine*,

Doctrine, to find Adversaries that would supplant and overthrow that of another, to substitute their own Opinions. Let us therefore see how such an Argument would operate, where *Reason* only, and not *Miracles*, supports the Doctrine. One Man establishes a *Sect* upon Principles that appear to him exceeding fine, and reasonable, and useful, and bids his Followers be sure to adhere to them, even unto Death; and never to depart from them, altho' (as he easily foresees) there may arise a Set of Men, that will oppose them with equal Reason. Every Body sees that this Desire, is only to continue to himself the Honour of a *Sect*; for if Men follow him only, because his Principles appear reasonable, why are not others Principles to be attended to, if they also then appear as reasonable, or more so? I look upon our Lord to be as well the *Wisdom* as the *Power* of God, and therefore, out of Reverence, dare not think he argues on this manner. Let us put out the word *Reason*, and put in its place the word *Miracles*, and see how it will do then. Here is a Man that says he comes from God, to teach the World his Will, which to follow is the only way to Happiness: The World
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is sufficiently desirous of being happy, but, it may be, dislikes the Way and Method propos'd, and thereupon distrusts the Messenger, and calls upon him to prove the truth of his Mission. The Messenger hereupon exercises a Power plainly divine, and works such mighty Miracles, as none can do excepting God be with him, and does thereby assure the World, that he came from God, and ought to be believ'd; but having occasion to remove, he tells his Followers, that they must by all means persevere in the Faith they had receiv'd, which they had seen establish'd upon Miracles, (such as — curing those who were born blind, walking upon the Waters, feeding thousands of People with a few Loaves, and raising the Dead to life again) notwithstanding that the time would come, when false Christs and false Prophets should arise, and preach up themselves and their own Doctrine, in opposition to Him and his; and to pervert them the sooner and the surer, should also work great Miracles, (cure the born-blind, walk upon the Seas, raise the Dead, &c.) Would the foretelling these great Miracles should be wrought, be sufficient, of it self, to spoil
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the credit of them when they were wrought? Would it be enough to say they must be false, because they were foretold? I believe you will not think so. And what would be the Judgment of an unbiass'd Man upon such a forewarning, but this?— that if Miracles give one Man Credit, the like Miracles will also give another Man the like Credit, and that will come (as I said) to this, that if they are wrought in Confirmation of Doctrines, or the truth of Messengers, opposite to one another, they will give Credit to neither; for 'tis impossible they should both of them be true. Do you then think upon the whole matter, that when Christ foretells of false Christs arising, and says they shall shew great Signs and Wonders, he means they shall work great and true Miracles, such as he himself had often wrought?

A. I believe no such matter. It can never enter into my mind, that God should permit either evil Spirits, or evil Men, to work as great and true Miracles, to overthrow the Christian Faith, as Christ and his Apostles wrought to plant and propagate it.

B. But what if he should permit them to work Miracles in appearance, and
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such as would deceive the Skill, the Caution, and the best Attention, that an honest Man could give and shew, altho' they were not true and real Miracles?

A. That, Sir, is all one and the same thing to me; for that which I with all my Skill, my Caution, and Attention, cannot discover to be a Delusion, and a Deception, will never be so to me, but will be true and real. Can you tell me, what this I hold in my hand is?

B. A Cane.

A. Then you know it is not an Eel. If you can tell which is a true and real Miracle, you can tell which is an appearing One, and a Delusion, if you examine them alike: If upon equal Examination they appear alike, they will continue so, till some new Discovery be made to shew the difference betwixt them. But I beseech you take your place again, and let me be the *Enquirer*, as I desire and want to be the *Learner*.

B. Away with your Respect; if we can find out the truth betwixt us, no matter who instructs or who learns. I ask you therefore, are there not abundance of extraordinary, strange, and wonderful things that come to pass, which we can give no manner of account of;

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some of which it may please God to permit Evil Men, or Evil Spirits to bring to pass, by which they shall endeavour to seduce unwary People :

A. A thousand, and ten thousand, without all question : But I value them not at all, if I cannot understand them to be properly Miracles. A *Centaur*, *Hyppogryph*, and a *Flying Dragon*, are things that were never seen ; but if I should chance to see a dozen of them together, I should reckon it no Miracle ; and yet no living Man, perhaps, could give an Account of their Generation. Where I can see no known and settled Laws of Nature changed, suspended, or subverted, there I can see no Miracle ; let the Event be never so strange, new, and astonishing. The Sun you know, journeys from East to West, that is the Course that God appointed him to run ; this I call the settled Course of Nature. Now, in it self, it is no greater thing, to journey from West to East, than from East to West ; but we should account it a miraculous thing to see him step but six Paces backwards from West to East. And I think we shall never be at any certainty, in discoursing on these matters,
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till we make the known, constant, settled Course of Nature, the Rule by which we are to judge of Miracles. I assure you I account the turning Water into Wine, or a Wand into a Serpent, a greater Miracle, than the walking of a huge Mountain for two Miles together, because I know not what the Power of several Causes in Nature may be; and greater, than if I should know some Spirit threw that Mountain two Miles at a Cast, because I know not what the Force of Spirits may be. This hint you gave me, as I remember, early, and I hope I improve it no farther than I may with Reason.

B. I think you are right; and by these means, you need not be troubled to account for a World of strange Relations of most marvellous things; for they are nothing to the matter in hand, if the known Course of Nature, and its settled Laws be not subverted or suspended.

A. What use would you have me make of all this?

B. Why, when our Saviour says that false Christs and false Prophets shall arise, and shall shew great Signs and Wonders——

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derstand thereby *great and true Miracles* — so, let them shew never so great Signs and Wonders, and do the most astonishing things that can be thought upon, you are not to be seduced by them, whilst you perceive no settled, known, and certain Laws of Nature suspended, changed, or subverted, by them, *i. e.* whilst you perceive no true Miracles wrought by them. I may see a thousand Events that amaze me, and confound me, but they may not be miraculous to me, properly speaking, unless they come within the Rule before set down, and thwart the establish'd Course of Nature that is known to us. If you had seen the Angel convey *Habbakuk* through the Air, and known he was an Angel, you would have gazed and wondered mightily, but would not have thought the Angel wrought a Miracle, because, for ought you knew, the natural Powers of Angels were such as would suffice for that, or a greater Purpose. But if you should see a Man bear up another Man, and carry him through the Air, you would, I believe, conclude the Action were miraculous, because you know, (as well as you know any thing) that Man is not endued with any

any such Powers. We know more of *true Miracles* than of *strange Accidents*; and can, I imagine, give a better Account of them.

A. Well, but to perplex me more, we are told, that God to try our Faith, and to see whether we will forsake a Doctrine confirm'd by true undoubted Miracles, may permit the Devil or wicked Men to work true undoubted Miracles also. This, Sir, is maintain'd by as learned Men of all Ages, and all sides, as ever lived — such as —

B. Hold, Sir, I entreat you, of all love, do not choak me with your great Names and Authorities. As much of Revelation as you will, and as much of these great Men's Reason, as you can bring: But since we have hitherto spared all Names, either *with* or *against* Us, let us go on, without offending either the Dead or the Living. Can you bring me an Instance, where God did ever permit a true undoubted Miracle to be wrought, by one that would seduce the People from Christianity, on purpose to try their Faith?

A. I know of none; but if these Seducers did at any time work true Miracles, and would by them seduce from

Christianity, the thing is the same.

B. I grant it to be somewhat like it. And what do they tell us we must do in such a Case as this? for, I assure you, 'tis a hard one.

A. Why, they tell us, that as the *Jews* were to reject all Miracles, how great soever, if the scope and intent of those who wrought them, were to carry them from the Worship of the Only true God, to Idolatry—— So are the Christians to reject all Miracles, how great and true soever, if they who work them, pretend to contradict the Worship of God through Jesus Christ, and the Gospel he preached among Men. The Law of *Moses* was the Standard by which the *Jews* were to judge of Miracles, and the Gospel is the Standard by which the Christians are to judge of the like.

B. This is but bringing us back again, to what we have discoursed of before—— We are it seems to judge of Miracles by the Doctrine they would establish, and not of the Doctrine by the Miracles that would establish it; only this goes a little farther, and will not let us believe upon the Account of Miracles, altho' we allow them to be true.

A. What

A. What need was there of any Miracles at all?

B. O, take it right. Christianity was to be establish'd by true undoubted Miracles at first; and so establish'd by them, that nothing but the most perverse and wicked Creature living, could hold out against it. And might not a Doctrine settled thus by Miracles, be again ventured to a Miracle? Might not a Man be tried even with a Miracle, to see if he could depart from a Religion thus established?

A. Let us speak plain, Sir, and ask another Question—— Is it possible for a Man to lose his certainty of any thing, by the same means by which he got that certainty? if it be, then may a Man part with his Christianity, upon the score of Miracles, wrought to prove it false, as fairly as he took it up upon the score of Miracles that were wrought to prove it true. Two Miracles can beget no more Certainty of the truth of Christianity, than two may beget Uncertainty of it, if wrought in opposition to it. I, never durst, for my heart, believe, that God could permit true Miracles to be wrought by any one attempting to seduce a Soul

from Christ, when I remembered that Christ's Religion was establish'd by true Miracles.

B. But is not the Case of the Christians, the same with that of the *Jews*? if the *Jews* must reject true undoubted Miracles, that are wrought to draw them to Idolatry; must not the Christians reject the like Miracles, that are wrought to draw them to Apostacy?

A. Yes certainly; but, as I remember, you have taught me to say, that the *Jews* had nothing to ground this Maxim on, but *Deut. xiii.* which you shewed me, neither did, nor could suppose that God would suffer a false Prophet to work true Miracles, to tempt the People to Idolatry, and I have ever since been of that Opinion: So that now, I do not say, I must reject Miracles that are wrought in Opposition to the Worship of One God — but I say — that none such are, or can be wrought, to tempt Men to Idolatry. And by the same Rule I also affirm, that no Miracles, true and undoubted ones were, or can be wrought to tempt Men to Apostacy from Christ's Religion. And as *Deut. xiii.* will not support this Rule of the *Jews*, making the Law
of

of *Moses* the Standard by which they are to judge of Miracles, so neither will this Passage in *St. Matth. xxiv. 24.* nor that in *Thess. ii. 9.* bear out the the Christians making the Gospel of our Lord, their Standard : Because at this rate, both Law and Gospel beg the Question in hand, and presuppose their own Truth. I do not say, but that both Law and Gospel may stand upon other bottoms, and be supported by other good and certain Proofs ; but I say, that with respect to Miracles, they beg the Question in hand, if they tell us we must reject true undoubted Miracles, because, or if wrought in opposition to them, since they were first establish'd upon true undoubted Miracles. For if you should tell me to day, that such a Proposition is true, and tell me to morrow it is false, I should believe it neither true nor false, upon your Authority, but judg as I found Reason. But pray will you be pleas'd to consider those words following—— *inso-*
much that if it were possible they should
deceive the very Elect.

B. I consider, that our Lord relates the matters of this Chapter, to his Disciples, on purpose to make them cau-
tious

tious, of being deceiv'd by these false Christs and false Prophets, who shew great Signs and Wonders. I infer therefore from hence, that these great Signs and Wonders, must be of such a Nature, as that they may be discovered and distinguished by the Elect, from those true mighty Miracles that were wrought by Christ, in favour of the Gospel, so that if they shall use their utmost Care, and Diligence, and Skill, they shall not be deceived by them. Why did our Saviour otherwise, forewarn his Disciples of these Signs and Wonders, and bid them beware of those that wrought them? This had been to no Purpose, if with their utmost Care, Diligence, and Skill, they could not have distinguish'd these false Christs, and their Wonders, from the true Christ, and his Miracles.

A. But might they not have been deceiv'd, had they not been the *Elect*?

B. The *Elect* are here, converted Christians, and such as had been so for some time, and were now rooted and establish'd in the Faith. And the meaning is, that without all Care, and Attention, and the Use and Exercise of their Faculties, the very oldest and the soundest

est Christians might be seduced by these pretended Christs and Prophets, who would make such use of the Signs and Wonders that should go before the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and play so many Tricks of their own, and be so confident in their Boastings, that it would stagger a modest and distrustful Man, to see and consider them. They must therefore beware, examine things, and stand upon their guard : For the Understanding and the Senses of good Men, are no better than those of their Neighbours ; the *Elect* may be as soon cheated as other People, if they will not look after themselves. I take these Words to be a good Proof, that by *Signs* and *Wonders*, we are not to understand true undoubted *Miracles* , for there is no way of guarding against true undoubted *Miracles* ; they carry all before them, when once we are convinced that they are true.

A. Be pleased then, to make as fair a riddance of the difficulties that seem to arise from that Passage of *St. Paul*, ii. *Thess.* ii. 9 — *Even him whose Coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders ; and I shall be entirely satisfied.*

B. This

B. This is a Description of the Coming of Antichrist, and tells us that *Satan* shall at that time work as powerfully and subtilly, as possibly he can, to withdraw Men from Christianity, and make them believe a Lye.

A. What do *lying Wonders* signify?

B. Either Tricks of Slight, and appearing Wonders, or Miracles that are to support a Lye, and false Doctrine; the Words may import both these Senses, if the Critical Men may be trusted; but I rather trust to our Translators, who have rendred it — *lying Wonders*, i. e. false and deceitful Tricks, things that may make us wonder, till we examine and discover them. I will not deny but that Spirits may foresee many Events that lye hid in their Natural Causes, which are concealed from *Us*, but not from *Them*; because I do not know the extent of their intellectual Powers: and from this foresight, they may discover to Men a great many Secrets, who may, upon this Intimation, presage notably. I will not deny them to be Creatures of great force and subtlety, and able to do a world of astonishing things, and able also to assist Men to the performing many great and marvellous

vellous Works. I know but little of these Beings, and the less I know, the less I am able to deny their Power to do so and so. But since it hath pleased God, to send his Son into the World, to reveal his Will, and to shew to us the way to Happiness, and in order to our believing and being perswaded by Him, to give Him the Power of working Miracles; I cannot see how he should gain his point, upon our hearts, if the Power of working Miracles, were common to any Being else with Him; and he should suffer Evil Spirits and Evil Men to work true Miracles, in contradiction to such Doctrine, as Christ himself built and establish'd on true Miracles. I understand, as well as can be, the Scriptures that tell me Christ did really work mighty Miracles; and I understand, as well those Passages that tell me, he wrought them to gain belief and credit with Mankind. But I do not understand half so well, some Passages that seem to say that wicked Spirits and wicked Men, may also work great Miracles, in contradiction of Christ's Religion. Shall I therefore give up what I *do* understand, for what I do *not*? Shall I part with Premises from whence I conclude my Belief
of

of Christ's Doctrine is reasonable and good, and take up an Opinion that destroys those Premises, since I am not able to reconcile them? I think that clear Places are to interpret obscure ones, rather than that obscure ones should perplex the clear. It may be, you may think, that this is rather cutting than untying Knots. I will say in short, that had it not pleased God to build, and establish the saving Truths of his Son *Jesus* upon Miracles, it had signified nothing, if every Man living had been permitted to work them, whenever he pleased: But since he hath used and appointed them as the means of Conviction, in matters of the greatest moment, I cannot but wonder at the unaccountable Easiness of Christians, in believing they may be wrought by every wanton or malicious Spirit.

A. But what would you have People do, when the Scriptures seem to countenance such an Opinion?

B. The Scriptures shall not only *seem to countenance* such an Opinion, but they shall say it downright, before I believe it. Shall the Scriptures tell me, that *Jesus* proved himself the Christ, the Holy One of God, by Miracles? And shall the
Scrip-

Scriptures also tell me, that Devils and Wicked Men shall work Miracles to prove that *Jesus* was not Christ, nor sent of God? Who will believe it? They do most honour, and most right, to the Scriptures, who clear them best from Contradictions and Absurdities, and Consequences that would overthrow their own Authority. And for this cause, I will understand this Passage to the *Thessalonians*, in any other sense, than such a one as would defeat the whole purpose of the Gospel. For, if by *lying Wonders* we must mean *true Miracles*, then shall Antichrist do as much for the support of a Lye, and Wickedness, as the true Christ did for Truth and Virtue, nay, he shall do the very same.

A. No, the Miracles of false Christs and false Prophets shall not be so great, nor many, as those of our Lord.

B. Who told you so? Or what reason have you to think so? Will they differ in kind, or in degree and measure? I have, before, given you my Opinion, touching the greatness and the multitude of Miracles, and will not repeat it here: Let it suffice to say, that much must not be built on those Distinctions of *greater* and *less*, *more* and *fewer*, for they will
not

not bear much weight. One Miracle appears greater than another, because of its greater Consequences, and because it affects our outward Senses more; but it really requires no less power to make a *Butterfly*, than an Army of *Eagles*: Nor less to restore Sight to *four* Blind, than to *four score* or a hundred. Our *Saviour* wrought a *hundred* Miracles, and *Moses* *fifty*, (let me suppose that number for Examples sake) is the Gospel therefore so much truer than the Law?

A. But will you not allow that *Simon Magus* did some Miracles?

B. I will not deny Miracles to have been wrought by Men, that were neither *Jews* nor *Christians*; but I deny that any were ever wrought to prove that *Moses* was an Impostor, or to prove that *Jesus* was not the *Christ*. I shall, if you desire it, find time to give account, why it might please God to work Miracles by several Men, out of the Pale of the Church, for several wise and good Purposes; but I maintain at present, that he hath suffered none to be wrought, in direct Opposition to the truth of either Law or Gospel. As for what you say of *Simon Magus*, to whom all the People of *Samaria* gave heed from the least to the great-

greatest, saying, *this Man is the great Power of God*—— I verily believe he wrought no true Miracles; because he was himself converted and baptiz'd, and continued with Philip, and wondred, beholding the Miracles and Signs which were done. Acts viii. 13. And I think if he could have wrought Miracles himself, before he became a Christian, Miracles would not have converted him to Christianity, nor would he have so wondred at Philip who wrought them. As for the many Stories related of his great Feats, I take leave to suspend, altho' they would not prejudice the Cause I take in hand, tho' allow'd as true, as other historical Narrations of that kind are.

A. You would have me, then, upon the whole matter believe, that since Christ actually wrought mighty Miracles, (as was foretold he should) and since he said himself, that the end for which he wrought them was, to gain Belief and Credit with the World—— that neither Men nor Devils can work true Miracles, in contradiction to the Gospel. You would not have me deny that Spirits, being of great Sagacity, Force, and Subtlety, can foretel many things, that are certain in their Natural
I Causes;

Causes; nor say they cannot do most strange and astonishing things, nor assist Men in the performance of amazing Works—— You would not have me deny any thing of this nature; but only stand to this, that they cannot bring true Miracles, when they would draw Men from the Worship of One God, or bring them to apostatize from Christianity. This, I think, is what you would have me insist on, because you say, that Miracles are the Foundation, upon which it has pleased God to build and establish the Religion taught by his Son *Jesus Christ*: And that since these things appear plain throughout the whole new Testament, beyond all Contradiction, you would not have me depart from the Belief of them, altho' there may be some few Passages in the same New Testament, that appear to say, that Evil Spirits, or Evil Men, should in time to come, endeavour to subvert the truth of the Gospel, and to that purpose, should be enabled, or permitted to work true Miracles: This Sense of those few Passages, you would, by no means have me admit, because, you think, it consists not with the other Scriptures, nor with *Christ's* purpose, nor indeed is reasonable:

ble : And tho' I may not be able to say, what is the certain and determinate Sense of them, yet I may well affirm that that is not their Sense, which would make the Miracles of Christ of none effect. And whatever notable Stories are told of *Simon Magus*, or other Enemies of Christ, you think they can none of them prove sufficiently, that true Miracles were ever wrought by any One, that intended by them to overthrow the Gospel of our Lord *Jesus Christ*. This, I believe, is the Sum of what you have endeavour'd at large to inform me of : For which I thank you heartily : But yet I must desire to trouble you a little farther. Suppose I yield, that neither Evil Men, nor Evil Spirits, shall ever be permitted to do any true Miracles, in direct Opposition to the Gospel of Christ : Yet how are Miracles a proper way of attesting to the Truth of any Messenger or Prophet of God — when Miracles have been certainly wrought, in all Ages, by Men that were no Prophets, nor pretended to come from God ? What must I do with all the Miracles that were wrought by Gentiles before the Coming of Christ, and by Gentiles since his Coming ?

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B. Whatever God is pleased to do, he does for wise Ends and Purposes, but he does not always discover them to Men. When he works Miracles without declaring his Purpose, his Purpose is effected tho' we know it not; and when he works them, and declares the end for which he works them, they also attain their End, and we know it. God works some Miracles, we know not why, but *he* does; and some he works, and tells us it is to give credit to them by whom he works them, and for those works sake, we do give credit to those Messengers.

A. If I should therefore see a Man work many Miracles, without knowing or hearing from him, that God gives him that Power, in order to gain him Credit, and that he may be believed in what he says, I need not regard him, or believe him, notwithstanding his working Miracles.

B. You must and would regard a Man, that should work Miracles; and whether he said much or little, you would strongly incline to believe him; because, believing that none can work Miracles, excepting God be with him, you would be ready to believe him favour'd by God, with whom he entrusted that great Power,

er, and consequently, think that Person worthy Credit ; but I agree with you, that you are under no obligation of Necessity, to believe all that a Man shall say, who works Miracles, without declaring he is sent of God, and telling you, that God has given him that miraculous Power, in order to obtain Credit with you.

A. You think it then necessary, that a Prophet should declare he is Commissioned from God, for such and such Purposes, and that this Power is the Seal of that Commission?

B. I do ; and that for this plain Reason, that we hear of a world of Miracles, that have been done in all Ages, by Men that have pretended to no Commission from God, nor to be sent at all by him. And also to prevent all Abuses that might be made of accidental Miracles, which it pleases God to work now and then, we know not why, and by Agents or Instruments that knew nothing of the matter, before the Miracle. And therefore I pray, observe and remember continually, that *Moses* and *Jesus Christ*, delivered the Sum, and general purpose of their Messages, before they wrought any Miracles, and afterwards wrought their Miracles to

attest that they were sent of God, and were to be believed. Thus *Moses* told the King and Court of *Ægypt*, *Exod. iv. 22, 23.* *Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my Son, even my first-born, and I say unto thee, let my Son go, that he may serve me, and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy Son, even thy first-born.* This was his Errand, this his End; Upon delivering this Message, — God told *Moses* and *Aaron*, *vii. 9.* that *Pharaoh* should say to them — *Shew a Miracle for Thou, i. e. shew me some convincing Token that you come from God, upon this Errand — then thou shalt say to Aaron, take thy Rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a Serpent.* This was a fairer way by much than it would have been, to have wrought his Miracle first, and then to have made use of its Authority to gain belief to what he should afterwards deliver; because, perhaps, this Miracle might have been accidental, and then it need not have been thought wrought to give him credit; and the King might have replied — You only take the Advantage of this strange Event or Transmutation, and think to recommend your self to Us, on its account; how does this prove you came from God? I have only your bare word

word for it: Had you first said you came from God, and to convince me of it, had told me God would work a Miracle, to witness your Commission; this Miracle had been a Seal of it; but now I may as well say, you take occasion from this Event, to come upon your own Errand, as you say, it testifies you came from God. Moses therefore first delivers his Errand, and then, upon demand, proves his Mission from God upon that Errand, by undeniable Evidence. And thus it was with our Lord Jesus. The first time of his publick manifestation, when he entred on his Office—— *He began to preach and to say, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* Or as it is, *Mark i. 16. Repent ye and believe the Gospel.* And *Matth. iv. 23. Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom; and healing all manner of Sickness, and all manner of Disease among the People.* He first declared the purpose of his coming, and laid down his Pretences in the general, and then convinced them by Miracles, He was the Person he said he was, and was to be believed. I do not mean, that he took this Course on every particular occasion he found to work a Miracle, but that he

took it at his first setting out, which was the fairest way that he could take.

A. I had not observed this enough, before this time; but the more I think on it, the more I like it, because (as you observ'd) it prevents and excludes all manner of Abuses, and undue Advantages, that crafty, and pretending People, might make of accidental Miracles, or, if you will, providential ones.

B. If it might be allowed me, I would fain distinguish all Miracles into *Providential*, and *Evidential* ones; those should be *Evidential* ones, which God enables Men to work in order to gain belief, and which they know before-hand, they shall work; these are such Miracles as *Moses* and our Saviour wrought, and other Prophets, and such as we have all along been speaking of. And those *Providential* ones, which are wrought, we know not certainly why, neither did the Instruments that wrought them, know any thing of them, before they were actually done, as I before said.

B. But what do you say to my Question, about Miracles wrought, as is said, by Heathens, both before the days of Christ, and since? Would you have me believe they were wrought indeed? and if so, what

what must I think they were wrought for? since some of them were wrought by very wicked Men, who could intend no good?

B. You will excuse me, if in answer to these Questions, I shall repeat somewhat of what I have said before. And *first*, it is very probable, that God hath in all Ages wrought some Miracles, without regard to bearing Testimony to any particular Truth, or Messenger; but meerly to attest his Providence, his Care, Protection, and Government of the World. When Natural Causes still produce their Natural Effects, according to the settled and establish'd Laws of the Creation; and Men pursue their Inclinations and Desires, according to their Powers and Opportunities, and every thing proceeds uninterrupted in its usual, regular, expected Course; the world of standers-by, grow, in a manner, sleepy, dull, and unaffected at what passes; and either reason little, or amiss, and are too often tempted to attribute all to second Causes. This is not rightly Reasoning, you know; but Constancy and Regularity, to unconsidering People, oft appear like Fate and strong Necessity, without any interposition

tion of the Will or Understanding of the Agent. And therefore God sometimes sees fit to produce some strange, unusual, and unnatural Effects, that shall astonish the Beholders, and thereby draw them to Attention and Consideration; and, as it were, awaken them from their Stupidity and Dulness, and cause them to lift up their Eyes and Thoughts to God, in Admiration, Praise, and Adoration of the Author of such mighty Works. So that this alone may be a sufficient account of many Miracles, that have happen'd in the World; that they attest to God's Providence, and keep up the Sense of his Being, Power, and Goodness in People's Hearts. *Secondly*, it may please God sometimes to work Miracles, purely for the Benefit of some particular Persons, without any Respect had to the Confirmation of any Truth, or Message. It is in his Nature to be merciful and good to all his Creatures, and there are many Cases that may happen, that may call for a miraculous and strange Assistance at his hands; not that can properly deserve such favour from him, but such as He, in pity, may see fit to relieve in a miraculous manner. I see, as yet, no Reason to distrust *all* the Relations of these

these sort of Miracles, where it has pleased God to rescue Innocence, and save the Oppressed, and cure the afflicted and diseased, by means and methods properly miraculous. It is not to be thought that all these Histories of such strange Deliverances and Cures reported by the Heathens, are meer lies and Fictions, altho' no doubt, but too too many of them are. God who is Lord and King of all the World, hath not so tyed himself to either Jew or Christian, but that he often hath, still does, and always will dispense great Favours to the Gentiles also, and, where he finds occasion, work great Wonders *for*, and *with* them; and therefore there is no need of denying Miracles to have been wrought among the Heathens. These I call all of them *Providential* Miracles, but they signify nothing to the confirmation of any other Truth, than that there is a Good, a Merciful, and Powerful God, that governeth the World, and loveth Mankind.

A. But granting this, yet what shall we say to Miracles said to be wrought among and by the Heathens, even after the Coming of Jesus Christ, when they might rather do mischief?

B. I do not see, why God should not be favourable to Heathens, even after Christ's coming, and, by permitting Miracles to be now and then wrought, keep up the Sense of his Being, Power, and Goodness among them: If you think these Miracles would rather hinder them from entertaining the Christian Doctrine, by affording them an Answer to the Christian Preachers and Apostles, namely — that they had also Miracles wrought among them — I answer, that all these were *Providential* Miracles, and were not wrought either in Opposition to, or Confirmation of any Doctrine, or way of Divine Worship, and therefore could be of no Advantage to the Heathen-Cause, nor Disadvantage to the Christian. But let me observe to you, upon this occasion, that many more Miracles have been discoursed of, and pretended to be wrought, by and among the Heathens, since our Saviour's days, than before them; which is a sort of Evidence to the truth of Christ's Miracles, a Confirmation I mean of the truth of the matter of fact, that Miracles were wrought by Christ, and a Confirmation that Christians insisted much upon that Argument to prove their Doctrine true. For this it was that

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occasioned the cunninger sort of Gentiles to spread abroad among the Vulgar, that other People wrought Miracles, as well as Christ, and Christians; and therefore that the pretence of Miracles, was not sufficient to withdraw them from their Antient, Universal Worship of many Gods. They could not deny that Christ, and Christians wrought both great and many Miracles, nor could they deny the natural force of such an Argument, unless they could oppose Miracles wrought by their own People, to the Miracles of Christ and Christians; for then they must signify nothing on either side, or as much on theirs, as on the Christian side. And therefore the Temptation to invent a great many strange Stories, was too great for them to withstand, and they fell into it. And therefore, as I said, there is a great deal more to do about Miracles, among the Heathen, since the days of Christ, than before.

A. But if the Christians had allowed that Miracles were and might still be wrought by and among the Heathens; had they not wanted an Answer, if the Heathen should have said ——— *You say* we must believe the Christian Doctrine upon the score of Miracles wrought by Christians;

ans; *We say* we may continue Heathens still, since Miracles have been, and are, and may be still wrought, by and among the Heathens; what would a Christian have had to reply to this?

B. A Christian might have said—
 “ I do not say that the Doctrine of Christ
 “ is true, because it has pleased God to
 “ work Miracles by, and among Chri-
 “ stians; for then I could not say, *the*
 “ *Gentile Worship is false*, since I allow
 “ that it hath pleased God, to work Mi-
 “ racles also *by, and among* the Gentiles :
 “ But this I say, that the Doctrine of
 “ Christ is true, because he said he came
 “ from God, and was to teach his Will,
 “ and, in confirmation of the truth of
 “ his coming from God, and of what he
 “ should deliver, he said he had Power to
 “ work great and many Miracles, and he
 “ did accordingly work great and many
 “ Miracles. And I say, moreover, that the
 “ Gentile Theology, and way of Worship,
 “ are not built on, or supported by, the
 “ Miracles that have been wrought by and
 “ and among the Gentiles, because they,
 “ who wrought them, pretended not to
 “ be sent of God, nor came to set up
 “ any particular way of Worship, nor
 “ knew that they should be able to work
 “ any Miracles, nor affirmed at any time,
 “ upon

“ upon the credit of those Miracles,
“ that Christianity was not the true Re-
“ ligion. All this, I think, a Christian
would, or might have said ; at least I
venture now to lay it down, as the surest
and most reasonable way of defending
Christianity against all Exceptions, I
mean as far as the Argument of Miracles
is concern'd to defend it, which I confess,
goes a great way with me.

A. You make no great account then,
it should seem, of many wonderful things
pass'd among the Heathens, because you
say they were *Providential* Miracles, not
Evidential ones. But what will you say
to the Blind and the Lame that were
both of them healed by *Vespasian* the Em-
peror, as *Suetonius* and *Tacitus* relate
the matter, both of them Men of great
Credit. “ These two People came, you
“ know, to *Vespasian*, and told him, the
“ God *Serapis* had shew'd them, in their
“ Sleep, that He might restore Sight to
“ the Blind, by spitting on him, and Feet
“ to the Lame, if he would but touch
“ him with his Foot. *Vespasian* believed
“ nothing of the matter, and therefore
“ durst not so much as try; but being
“ encouraged by those who stood about
“ him, he at last attempted, and had
“ the

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“ the Success that had been foretold.
What say you to this?

B. Why, I say to it, *first*, that it looks as if it had been, in part, transcribed from *Mark* viii. 23. and other Places, where our Saviour uses the same Actions in curing the blind. *Secondly*, It appears an Artifice of *Vespasian's* Friends and Followers, to raise his Credit with the World: *Suetonius* says, he was so obscure, and rose to be a Prince so unexpectedly, that he wanted Majesty, and something to give him Authority with Mankind, and that this Accident did very luckily do it: It looks suspiciously, that he should be importun'd by his Followers to do what he was ashamed himself to attempt; it looks as if the matter had been laid by his Friends, and that they would warrant the Success. But, *thirdly*, believing the whole Relation upon the Credit of so good Authors, I say it affects not the Cause in hand; *Vespasian* according to the Forms prescribed, was instrumental in restoring a Blind and Lame Man; He was so far from knowing himself endu'd with any such Power, that he did not believe it, when told him from *Serapis*; he durst not so much as try to follow the Forms prescribed him to perform these Works; he pretended

tended to establish no Truth, or way of Divine Worship, when he had actually performed them; in a word, he made no Consequences, nor desired any to be made, but that which would naturally follow, that the People should hold the Man in great honour, who was so favour'd of the Supreme Power, or (in their Language) of the Gods. Do you not plainly perceive that this was a *Providential* Miracle, that God was pleased to work by *Vespasian*, without any Knowledge of, or Pretences to such Power, beforehand, and without any Inferences drawn from the exercise of it, afterwards?

A. I acknowledge what you intimate, that the truth of Christianity is not prejudiced, nor the Miracles of Christ disgraced, by any such *Providential* Miracles wrought *by* and *among* the *Gentiles*. But, sure, the Worship of *Serapis*, would by such an accidental Advantage be strangely encouraged, and how will that consist with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, who has the Abominations of the Gentiles in such abhorrence?

B. I did not undertake to account for all the Permissions of Providence: You may lay this difficulty down, if you please, for one Reason why you should

not believe this Relation; but my Business is to shew, that supposing it to be true, it makes nothing against Christ's Miracles. However, I say, that no Miracle could well be wrought in a Country given up to Idolatry, but it might serve to confirm them in their Mistakes, some way or other, by a false Application; and it is not an uncommon thing, to find the Gentiles attributing these sort of Visions, and salutary Admonitions, to *Serapis*, *Isis*, and others, (according to the Country, and the Deities they worshipped) which yet might well proceed from the true God, the Father of Spirits. But this is not much to our present purpose.

A. But pray, what shall we do with *Apollonius Tyanæus*? The accounts of that Man's wonderful Works, they say, are strange and surprizing; and he is, you know, often compar'd with *Christ Jesus*.

B. You say true: Great things are said of that Man; and *Hierocles*, who was himself a considerable Man, compar'd him to Christ, and wrote a Book to that purpose; which *Eusebius* answered; and he who reads *Philostratus's* Life of him, will find cause to believe that he had read the New Testament, and intended *Apol-*
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Ionius should be very like *Christ*. But *Philostratus* wants Vouchers very much, and his History is so written, that I dare trust any fair ingenuous Heathen with it, and make him Judg whether the Life and Miracles of *Apollonius* be to be compared with the Life and Miracles of *Christ*. But this is not the thing in hand ; let *Philostratus*'s Credit be, in this case, good. Let it be granted that *Apollonius* wrought Miracles, what will follow ? that *Apollonius*'s Religion is true ? What was it ? Where is it to be found ? Give us an Account of the Theology he taught, and design'd to plant and propagate. No such thing appears, even in *Philostratus* ; He was a strict Disciple of *Pythagoras*, and altogether favour'd that Sect : But did he ever tell the World, that they must all of them follow *Pythagoras* ? Was that the way, indeed, of any of the antient Philosophers ? They made to themselves Parties, and gain'd Profelytes, and had certain Opinions peculiar to their Sect, which they maintain'd themselves, and would have others also embrace ; but they still applied to Men of Learning, and resorted to the Publick Schools. Do you find any of them preaching to the Common People, and telling them, that unless they change

their Opinions, and follow *Pythagoras*, *Zeno*, *Epicurus*, or such like, the Gods will never favour them, nor bless them? This was not their way, nor the way of *Apollonius*; He went up and down in a strange Habit, and (as he had occasion) he corrected People's Errors, and blamed their vicious Practices; and said many good and wise things; and talked to great Princes with a Freedom that became a true Philosopher, that valued not the World, and all it could offer; but he set up for no Religion, he amended the Ceremonies of several People, but he left them, otherwise, in the way he found them. He sacrific'd himself to *Jupiter*, to *Hercules*, to the *Sun*, and other Deities according to the Places he came to, tho' not with any living Creatures, for that was against his Master's Rule, to shed the Blood of any living Creature; and if you will believe *Philostratus*, he wrought many Miracles, some considerable ones, others very poor ones; but he valued himself nothing upon their account, but attributed them all to God, and says no more, than that so many People as were the Subjects of his Miracles, were benefited by him: He wrought none of them to testify that a-
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ny God had sent him ; and he drew no Consequences in favour of any thing he had said, from any thing he had done; he called not on his Works to prove the truth of his Mission, or his Doctrine; and is it not pretty strange, that People should attribute more to a Man upon the account of his Miracles, than he himself assumes? Is it Modesty in such a Case, not to own you came from God, with Commission to declare his Will, and with a Power that will testify to that Commission, when indeed you are sent of God, and are intrusted with that Power? Is it not rather to be wanting to your Duty? I wonder much to see Men make more of *Apollonius* than he made of himself. A Philosopher is to be modest; but a Prophet or Messenger from God is to be faithful to his trust, to tell his Errand, and to bring his Vouchers; he that comes from God, must say so, and must prove it. This was the way that *Moses* and our *Saviour* took: Let them shew us *Apollonius* making these Pretences, and confirming them by Miracles; let us see what sort of Divine Worship he establishes, in opposition to what was before in the World; or lastly, let us hear if he speaks a Word in

Opposition to Christ's Religion, which was then planted, and had taken root in many places whether *Apollonius* came. You feel allow as much to *Apollonius* as his Historian gives me leave; and yet Christianity shall receive no Prejudice: His Miracles will neither establish his own Religion, nor subvert the Religion of Christ, for they were wrought for neither of those purposes: And so I will take my leave of him, when I have observ'd, that nothing so ill becomes the mouth of a *Deist*, as reproaching to Christians the Miracles of *Apollonius*; for if they are true, and to be built upon, it is not *Deism*, but *Polytheism* is established, for he sacrificed, in his way, to the Gods all round, as their Temples occur'd to him. As to the last Branch of your Question, what you must say to Miracles that are said to be wrought by very wicked Men, I have already told you, you must not much mind the Instrument that God uses, for he sees good reason sometimes to use bad ones; *Balaam* prophesies, and *Caiaphas* prophesies, without the Spirit of a Prophet; and *Judas* was an Apostle, and was sent by Christ among the rest, to preach the Gospel, cure diseases, and work Miracles. And
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our Saviour will say to some at the last day, who have wrought Miracles, and done great things and mighty Works *in his Name, and by his Power, I know you not, depart from me, ye workers of Iniquity.* And therefore the Conclusion is not infallible, such a One wrought great Miracles, and was therefore a most holy, righteous Person ; for God may exercise his Power, and convey his Favours to other People, by Means and Instruments unworthy (to our thinking) such Employment.

A. But tho' *the People* need not all be good and holy, by whom God works Miracles, yet sure the *Religion* they profess must needs be true.

B. Then have we been talking all this while to no purpose. Why, Friend of mine, the Christian Religion it self, is not true, only because Miracles have been, are, and may be, wrought by and among Christians. For, by that Argument, all the Religions that ever were in the World must be true, unless we can disprove all the Histories and Accounts that have been given us, and say, that no Relations but those in the Scriptures are true ; a task I would not have you undertake. But I see your Drift ; tell,

therefore, those confident Boasters of Miracles, that *Suetonius* and *C. Tacitus* are much more credible Authors, than a thousand of their Legendary Writers; and that if the Popish Religion be therefore true, (as distinguish'd from the Reformed one) because that Miracles are wrought by Papists, so was *Vespasian's* Religion true, because he cur'd the Lame and Blind. Tell them *Philostratus's* Life of *Apollonius* is a true History, compar'd with the Lives of a hundred of their Saints; and that if Popery be true, because these Saints liv'd and dy'd in the Profession of it, who yet wrought Miracles—— then may we offer Sacrifice to *Hercules*, to *Jove*, and to *Apollo*, because *Apollonius* did so, and yet wrought Miracles. I will not be slow to say, that the Miracles of the One, are full as credible as those of the other, and have really done Christianity as little harm, when believ'd. But of this matter you may see enough in all our *English* Writers. Say only to these People; Lay down the Doctrines beforehand, which you tell us are necessary to be believed, as parts of the Christian Religion, (and not believed by the Reformed Churches) and tell us, beforehand, that God, to testify

stify to the truth of these Doctrines, hath given you power to work true Miracles, and then work them, as Christ and his Apostles wrought theirs, in the presence of those who are to be convinced of the truth of what you say. — Say this to them, and hear their Answer, and till that time, mind not any thing they say concerning Miracles, for all the rest will be but idle Talk.

I suppose our Business now is drawing to a Conclusion, and I hope I have discharg'd my self of my Engagement, to your Satisfaction.

A. You have Sir; and I have nothing left to say, if I may not trouble you, once more, to recapitulate what has been lately said.

B. I say then, that it makes a remarkable difference betwixt such as work Miracles, that One shall know and declare beforehand, that he shall be enabled to work them. Our Lord bad *Philip* furnish out a Table for five thousand Strangers; but the Gospel says — that he did it but to prove him, *for he himself knew beforehand what he would do*, John vi. 6. So *Moses* was before instructed of God, that he should do such and such Miracles, which he foretold he would do, whereas
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the Magicians were sent for to see what they could do, and knew not that they should do any thing, till God permitted them to try, and (for wise Reasons of his own) permitted them also to *do* three Miracles. They knew not when to begin, nor when to make an end; for (encouraged by three Successes) they attempted to go on, *and bring Lice upon the Land, and could not*, a certain token that they were ignorant of any Power they had to do Miracles; for had they known what they *could* do, they might have also known what they *could not* do, and consequently, never have attempted it: For, it was full as easy, to have brought Lice upon the Land, as to have turn'd a Wand into a Serpent, Water into Blood, and brought up Frogs upon the Land, which God had before suffered them to do. But these Magicians knew not, they *should* do the one, nor knew they *should not* do the other. And this I take to be the Case of all, besides *Moses, Elijah, Christ*, and his *Apostles*, and some of their Followers, who were all God's true Messengers. This is the Case of all besides them, that they either pretended to work Miracles, and *could not*, by which they betrayed themselves for false Prophets;

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or else they were permitted to work Miracles, without pretending to it, or knowing that they should work any. To the *first* Head we may refer all false Prophets, and all the Stories of Miracles that are told us without good proof: We have not sufficient Authority to believe them; the Credit of the Relaters shakes; the Circumstances of the Story discover the Cheat, and a wise observing Man cannot believe them: Under this Head I place a great many Histories of Miracles done by Heathens, especially such as happened after Christ's time, for then Miracles began to grow upon the World, in answer to the Christian Pretences, for which much must be allowed to them: And under this Head I rank a thousand Fooleries and vain Pretences to Miracles among the Christians, who in this matter outlied the Heathens a great deal. Under the *second* Article, of such as have wrought Miracles without pretending to it, or knowing they had any such Power, I rank all the Histories of Miracles done among either Heathens or Christians whose Credit is good, and related by Authors of Honesty and good account. There is no need of denying many Miracles to have been wrought *among* and *by* the Heathens. God

is a God that worketh Wonders, and sheweth his Power among the People. And as there are many Causes and Occasions of working Miracles, besides the giving credit to his Messengers and Prophets, so we need not doubt, but God takes hold of them, and uses them to his own Glory, and the good of Mankind. Nor is there any need of denying many true and great Miracles to have been wrought *by and among* Christians, of all Ages. But as the Miracles wrought *among and by* the Heathens, were no proof of the truth of their Religion; no more are they of the truth of the Christian Religion by being wrought *by and among* them. That Consequence is not necessary, because God has more Ends to serve, by Miracles, than the Confirmation of the truth of a Religion. And when we hear of Miracles, wrought by Heathens, and by Christians, without any fore-knowledge of the Parties that wrought them, or without any Declaration of those People, to what end and purpose they were wrought; we need not be concern'd to disprove the Relation, or to discredit the matter of Fact. Let it be so; the Miracles were wrought; what then? Is the Religion of the Country there

therefore of God? if so, apply it to the Heathens, who have, without all question, had many great and true Miracles, wrought *among* and *by* them. If this do not follow there, neither will it follow here. Let not Christians build any part of their Faith upon such *Providential*, accidental Miracles: But let them rest on the Foundation of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, confirm'd by certain, plain, foreknown, and foretold Miracles; and on the Superstructure rais'd thereon by *Christ the Lord*, who knew he had the Power of Miracles, and foretold what he would do, and to what end and purpose he would do them, namely, to gain belief by them. God may restore Sight to the Blind, by the hands of a Man, who knoweth not that he shall be the Instrument of conveying so great a Blessing; and People will love, esteem, and honour this Man; but it will not follow from hence, that all this Man shall say, shall be believ'd as Revelation. But if a Man shall say he comes from God, and is to declare his Will, and be believ'd; and to shew he does so, tells them he has Power from God, to restore Sight to the Blind, and actually performs his word, and works that Miracle; the People will then be oblig'd to be-

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believe what he delivers them from God, not only for the sake of his miraculous Work, but for the sake of his fore-knowing and fore-telling he should work it. The Reason of this, is, that the Miracle is not accidental, but fore-seen. Had it been accidental, it had had no necessary Consequence, the Instrument might have been honoured : But being fore-seen, the Instrument had been also a Prophet, and therefore deserv'd the belief he wanted, and wrought that Miracle to obtain. This fore-knowledg of *Christ* (let me here observe, since I forgot to mention it in its place) differed from that of his *Apostles*, *Moses*, and all other Messengers of God, very much. *Christ* knew he could at all times, work what Miracles he pleas'd; and that his Power was under no restraint or limitation; and tho' he did not all the Miracles he *could*, yet he did all he *would*, and his Will was govern'd by his Reason. *Moses* and *Christ's* Disciples (even after all Power was committed to them by *Christ* just ready to ascend) could not work what Miracles they pleas'd; but still they always knew what they should be able to do, and therefore never attempted any thing in vain : The fore-knowledg of what they intend-

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ed to do, was common to both. For tho' it is said *Matth.* xvii. and *Mark* ix. that the Disciples could not dispossess the Lunatick, yet you know, that when they asked our Lord privately why they *could not* cast out that Devil, he upbraided them with *want of Faith*, and said it was *because of their Unbelief*. Now *Unbelief* signifies here, the not believing that they should, by the Power of Christ entrusted with them, be able to do that work (as might be proved at large, if it were needful) if Unbelief therefore hindred them from casting that Devil out, then it is plain they did not believe that they should cast him out; and why should you think then they attempted it who believed they should not effect it? I think it much more likely, that finding themselves distrustful of the Event, and wanting Faith, they would not venture the Success. This, I think, is the only Instance, that seems to gainsay, what I have laid down, and this, were there a good Occasion, might be otherwise accounted for, if what is said be not sufficient. And, to speak what I think, this ought to make the difference between Workers of Miracles, above all other

ther things whatever. This Consideration shews, that tho' all Miracles have their Use, yet that those alone can attest to the Mission of a Prophet; which he fore-knows he shall be enabled to do, and so fore-tells to others; leaving no room for Suspicion that he intends to make use of what accidental Miracles may happen to be wrought by him, to gain belief to what he says. But I forget my self, and doubt I have rather been *repeating* than *recapitulating* what we have lately said. But you will pardon Me, if the Zeal I have for the Cause in hand, hath made me tedious; and out of a great deal said, you may afford to forget a great deal.

A. I will study to forget nothing of what I have heard from You, for methinks, I am better able to defend my Religion, on this bottom, than I was before, without it. But whatever else I forget, I will not forget my Obligations to You, for Your Pains and Patience with me.

FINIS.

